







*Portrait of the artist*

LEHMAN, DONALD L. (1871-1941)

*Portrait of the artist*







THE  
LIFE AND SPEECHES

OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.

BY

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*WITH GALLERY OF PORTRAITS OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES  
ETCHED BY CHARLES LAURIE.*

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## CHAPTER VII.

### *REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS.*

The Potato Disease in Ireland.—The Government and the Crisis.—Lord John Russell's important Letter declaring for Free Trade.—Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright appeal to the Prime Minister.—The Corn Laws doomed.—Great League Meeting at Covent Garden Theatre.—Cabinet Difficulties.—Peel returns to Office.—Meeting of Parliament.—Measure for the Repeal of the Corn Laws introduced.—Sir Robert Peel's Statement.—Protracted Debates.—Mr. Bright's eulogium upon the Premier.—The Corn Importation Bill passes both Houses.—Dissolution of the League.—Interesting proceedings.—Final Speech by Mr. Bright.—Celebrations in the Country.—Presentations to the League Leaders.—General Effects of Free Trade.

**I**N the middle of August 1845, there began to appear the earliest indications of that mysterious potato disease which was to complete the work of the Anti-Corn-Law League, and to force from Parliament that measure of repeal which had long been clamoured for in vain. In Ireland the minute plague spread rapidly, till it blackened thousands of acres, and destroyed the food of millions of men. In a very short time two-thirds of the tubers were found to be rotten within, though large and well-looking without. On the 13th of October Sir R. Peel wrote to Sir J. Graham that the accounts of the state of the potato crop in Ireland were becoming very alarming. Something would have to be done, and he had no confidence in such remedies as the prohibition of exports or the stoppage of distilleries; the removal of the impediments to import was the only effectual remedy.

A meeting of the League was held in the Free Trade Hall on the 28th of October. The object of the meeting was to point out

the remedy for the famine which threatened England, and to avert the misery, starvation, and death of millions in Ireland. Mr. Cobden said the natural and obvious remedy was to open the ports. Russia, Turkey, Germany, and Holland had done so, and why should not our Government follow their example? Mr. Bright said that everything around was telling them in a voice louder than ever that every word of reproach, every harsh saying which they had uttered against the Corn Law, had not by any means conveyed its true character as it was then exhibited. The Corn Law was now having its due effect, and one which its framers anticipated—that of taking something from the produce of the millions of almost starving poor, and handing it to the rich. Looking at the matter in every light, he added, ‘How dreadful the abandonment of duty, how awful the crime, not less than that of those who made the Corn Law, if we step back from our place, if we fail in the work we have set ourselves, which is to abolish the law that restricts the bounty of Providence, and to establish the original and heaven-given law which will give plenty to all the earth.’

Cabinet Councils now became frequent, and in a memorandum, afterwards published, dated November 1st, the Premier asked, ‘Can we vote money for the sustenance of any considerable portion of the people on account of actual or apprehended scarcity, and maintain in full operation the existing restrictions on the free import of grain? I am bound to say my impression is that we cannot.’ The Government were memorialised from all quarters instantly to open the ports. The Prime Minister was desirous of giving way, but there were dissensions in the Cabinet, his only supporters being the Earl of Aberdeen, Sir James Graham, and Mr. Sidney Herbert. The Dublin Mansion House Relief Committee issued a series of resolutions, one of which was to the following effect: ‘We feel it an imperative duty to discharge our consciences of all responsibility regarding the undoubtedly approaching calamitous famine and pestilence throughout Ireland, an approach which is imminent and almost immediate, and can be obviated only by the most prompt, universal, and efficacious measures of procuring food and employment for the people.’ The Committee impeached the conduct of the Ministry in

refusing to open the ports, or to call Parliament together earlier than usual.

At this juncture, Lord John Russell wrote from Edinburgh to his constituents, the electors of the City of London, admitting that it was no longer worth while to contend for a fixed duty. 'Let us unite to put an end to a system which has been proved to be the blight of commerce, the bane of agriculture, the source of bitter division among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality, and crime among the people.' His lordship called upon the Government for satisfactory measures. Lord Morpeth, in forwarding a subscription to the League Fund, wrote to Mr. Edward Baines: 'I wish to record, in the most emphatic way I can, my conviction that the time has come for a final repeal of the Corn Laws, and my protest against the continued inaction of the State in the present emergency.' When this letter was read at the Leeds meeting, the enthusiasm which prevailed was indescribable. It also caused considerable excitement in London.

Mr. Cobden, speaking at one meeting in London, called on Sir Robert Peel to save the country from the impending famine. 'There is no man in the world,' he said, 'whether he be the Grand Turk, or whether he be a Russian despot, who has more power than Sir Robert Peel now has in this country. He has the power, and I say he is a criminal and a poltroon if he hesitates a whit.' Mr. Bright also said: 'Sir Robert knows well enough what is wanted, and were his government ten times as strong as it is, it must yield before the imperious and irresistible necessity which is every day gaining upon it. From his recent speeches I should argue that he intends to repeal the Corn Law. He cannot say what he now says, and yet mean ever to go back to the old and foolish policy of protection. He sprang from commerce, and until he has proved it himself, I will never believe that there is any man—much less will I believe that he is the man—who would go down to the grave, having had the power to deliver that commerce, and yet not having had the manliness, honesty, and courage to do it.'

On the 4th of December, the *Times* made the startling announcement that Parliament would be summoned for the first week in

January, and that the Royal Speech would recommend an immediate consideration of the Corn Laws, preparatory to their total repeal. This information was described as an 'atrocious fabrication' by the *Standard*, but its accuracy was speedily demonstrated. Lord Stanley and the Duke of Buccleuch having signified their inability, however, to support the Premier in his repeal policy, Sir Robert Peel temporarily resigned office on the 5th of December. At the same time, he intimated to the Queen that if she should entrust Lord John Russell with the formation of a Government, he would support measures founded on the general principle indicated in his lordship's letter to the electors of the City of London. On the 15th, Mr. Cobden, speaking at a meeting in the London Guildhall, said he had been over almost every part of the country, and the accounts he had received of the potato crop were so bad, that he believed in many districts before next spring there would not be any even for seed. 'What infatuation, then, must it be on the part of those dukes and squires who go maundering about like old women at public meetings—who rise in the morning and go out to shoot, and come home in the afternoon to their champagne and venison.' If there was no potato rot, he wanted to know what murrain it was which had crept into the Cabinet. At another gathering in Covent Garden Theatre, on the 17th, he said that the League had only to work for six months longer, when it would be dissolved into its primitive elements by the triumph of its principles. On the same day, Sir Robert Peel wrote to the Queen that he could not fetter himself, before the Corn Laws were discussed in Parliament, by a distinct pledge to Lord John Russell that he would support their immediate and total repeal.

At this critical period, a great League meeting was held at Covent Garden Theatre on the 19th, Mr. Bright being the principal speaker. His address on that occasion was very telling and vigorous. He began by stating that during the past month he had been present at meetings in Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, Somersetshire, and Middlesex; and he had been forced to the conclusion that the agitation throughout the kingdom was of no trivial or common character. The question now arose, how was social order

to be preserved? and he affirmed that the continuous government of the country by any Administration was totally incompatible with the maintenance of the Corn Laws. The speaker then eloquently said—

‘This contest has now been waged for seven years; it was a serious one when commenced, but it is a far more serious one now. Since the time when we first came to London to ask the attention of Parliament to the question of the Corn Law, two millions of human beings have been added to the population of the United Kingdom. The table is here as before; the food is spread in about the same quantity as before; but two millions of fresh guests have arrived, and that circumstance makes the question a serious one, both for the Government and for us. These two millions are so many arguments for the Anti-Corn-Law League—so many emphatic condemnations of the policy of this iniquitous law. I see them now in my mind’s eye ranged before me, old men and young children, all looking to the Government for bread; some endeavouring to resist the stroke of famine, clamorous and turbulent, but still arguing with us; some dying mute and uncomplaining. Multitudes have died of hunger in the United Kingdom since we first asked the Government to repeal the Corn Law; and although the great and powerful may not regard those who suffer mutely and die in silence, yet the recording angel will note down their patient endurance, and the heavy guilt of those by whom they have been sacrificed.’

Mr. Bright then went on to observe that there had been a succession of skirmishes, but they now approached the final conflict. The struggle was that of the many against the few—between the numbers, wealth, comforts, the all, in fact, of the middle and industrious classes, and the wealth, the union, and sordidness of a large section of the aristocracy of this empire; ‘and we have to decide,—for it may be that this meeting itself may to no little extent be the arbiter in this great contest,—we have to decide now, in this great struggle, whether in this land in which we live we will longer bear the wicked legislation to which we have been subjected, or whether we will make one effort to right the vessel, to keep her in her true course, and if possible to bring her safely to a secure haven.’ The landlord rule in this country had been long, and its legislation corrupt and unequal. Under the sway of landlordism, great numbers of the people had been reduced to pauperism. He proceeded to demonstrate the evils of protection, and the miserable condition of the agricultural labourers. ‘The crowning offence of the system of legislation under which we have been living is, that a law has



been enacted in which it is altogether unavoidable that these industrious and deserving men should be brought down to so helpless and despairing a condition. By withdrawing the stimulus of competition, the law prevents the good cultivation of the land of our country, and therefore diminishes the supply of food which we might derive from it. It prevents, at the same time, the importation of foreign food from abroad, and it also prevents the growth of supplies abroad, so that when we are forced to go there for them, they are not to be found.'

The most demoniacal ingenuity, he asserted, could not invent a scheme more calculated than this ingeniously malignant law to bring millions of the working classes into a state of pauperism, suffering, discontent, and insubordination. And then a fat and sleek dean, a dignitary of the Church and a great philosopher, recommended for the consumption of the people—he did not read a paper about the supplies that were to be had in the great valley of the Mississippi—Swede turnips and mangel-wurzel;—and the Hereditary Earl Marshal of England, as if to out-herod Herod himself, recommended hot water and a pinch of curry powder.

Here was a law which said to twenty-seven millions of people, 'Scramble for what there is, and if the poorest and the weakest starve, foreign supplies shall not come in for fear some injury should be done to the mortgaged landowners.' But the promises of Lord John Russell, or any other Minister, to repeal this law were only conditional. They could not of themselves repeal the Corn Law. It could only be done by the unequivocal expression of the public will. Having promised such a demonstration throughout the country as should make the monopolists quail, Mr. Bright thus concluded:—

'Two centuries ago the people of this country were engaged in a fearful conflict with the Crown. A despotic and treacherous monarch assumed to himself the right to levy taxes without the consent of Parliament and the people. That assumption was resisted. This fair island became a battle-field, the kingdom was convulsed, and an ancient throne overturned. And if our forefathers, two hundred years ago, resisted that attempt—if they refused to be the bondmen of a king, shall we be the born thralls of an aristocracy like ours? Shall we, who struck the lion down, shall we pay the wolf homage? or shall we not, by a manly and united expression of public opinion, at once, and for ever, put an end to this giant wrong?

'Our cause is at least as good as theirs. We stand on higher vantage-ground ; we have larger numbers at our back ; we have more of wealth, intelligence, union, and knowledge of the political rights and the true interests of the country ; and, what is more than all this, we have a weapon, a power, and machinery, which is a thousand times better than that of force, were it employed—I refer to the registration, and especially to the 40s. freehold, for that is the great constitutional weapon which we intend to wield, and by means of which we are sure to conquer, our laurels being gained, not in bloody fields, but upon the hustings and in the registration courts. Now I do hope that if this law be repealed within the next six months, and if it should then be necessary that this League should disperse, I do trust that the people of England will bear in mind how great a panic has been created among the monopolist rulers by this small weapon, which we have discovered hid in the Reform Act, and in the constitution of the country. I would implore the middle and working classes to regard it as the portal of their deliverance, as the strong and irresistible weapon before which the domination of this hereditary peerage must at length be laid in the dust.'

On the morning after the delivery of this speech, Lord John Russell informed Her Majesty that he had found it impossible to form an Administration. Sir Robert Peel was sent for the same day, and agreed to return to office. The Duke of Buccleuch now ceased his opposition, and the only change in the official list of the restored Peel Cabinet was the substitution of Mr. Gladstone for Lord Stanley as Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The League held an important meeting at Manchester on the 23d of December, when it was resolved to raise a fund of a quarter of a million sterling for the purpose of promoting Free-trade principles in the existing emergency. Upwards of £60,000 was subscribed in the room—the largest sum ever subscribed in the same space of time for any cause. Mr. Bright expressed his great delight with the proceedings. They had never seen in all their experience any meeting to compare with that. The past meetings had demonstrated that the supporters of the League were in earnest, and this meeting, if any confirmation were required, furnished that confirmation ; and he was convinced that it would have a powerful effect on public opinion. Amongst firms which subscribed £1000 each were the following : Messrs. S. Greg and Sons, T. Hoyle and Sons, Robert Platt, James Chadwick, John Bright and Brothers, Thomas Ashton and Sons, H. and E. Ashworth, A. and S. Henry and Co., and J. and N. Philips and Co. The subscribers of £500 each were

very numerous. This meeting had a powerful influence upon the monopolists and the press, showing, as it did, the unalterable determination of the League to push their campaign to victory.

Parliament met on the 22d of January, and Sir Robert Peel, in the course of some personal explanations made during the debate on the Address, admitted that his opinions on the question of the Corn Laws had undergone a complete change. 'The immediate cause of resignation,' he said, 'was the great and mysterious calamity which had befallen Europe—the failure of the potato crop. But it would be unfair to the House if I were to say that I attached exclusive importance to that particular cause. I will not withhold the homage which is due to the progress of reason and to truth, by denying that my opinions on the subject of protection have undergone a change. Whether holding a private station or in a public one, I will assert the privilege of yielding to the force of argument and conviction, and acting upon the results of enlarged experience. It may be supposed that there is something humiliating in making such admissions. Sir, I feel no such humiliation; I should feel humiliation if, having modified or changed my opinions, I declined to acknowledge the change for fear of incurring the imputation of inconsistency.' The Prime Minister further said that while he should have regarded relief from the task before him with honour as a favour, yet while honour and a sense of public duty required it, he did not shrink from office. 'I do not desire to be the Minister of England, but while I am Minister of England I will hold office by no servile tenure. I will hold office unshackled by any other obligation than that of consulting the public interest, and providing for the public safety.'

The Government measures were brought forward in the House of Commons on the 27th. The House was crowded, even to its approaches, and amongst the distinguished strangers present were Prince Albert and the Duke of Cambridge. Sir Robert Peel's speech occupied three hours and a half. He proposed, he said, with regard to the great question of the Corn Laws, that there should be a total repeal at the end of three years. From the passing of the Act, and until the 1st of February 1849, the maximum duty would be 10s., exigible when the price was under 48s., and to fall a shilling

with every shilling of rise in the price till the price reached 53s., when the duty was to fall to the minimum of 4s. The duties on barley and oats would undergo an alteration proportionally the same; all grain from British colonies to be admitted free of duty, and maize or Indian corn to be admitted, immediately after the passing of the Act, at a nominal duty. Other articles in the tariff, under the heads of articles of food, agriculture, manufacture, and miscellaneous, were dealt with, to the amount of several hundreds, in the way of duties repealed or reduced. By way of compensating the landed interest, the Premier proposed a consolidation of parish-road trusts, an alteration in the law of settlement, transferring the burden from the parish of the pauper's birth to that in which he had an industrial residence of five years last preceding his application for relief; the payment from the treasury of one-half the cost of medical attendance on paupers; and the removal from the local rates of the expenses of criminal prosecutions, which were to be defrayed in future by an annual Parliamentary vote. In closing, Sir Robert Peel said: 'Because this is a time of peace, because you are not subject to any coercion whatsoever, I entreat you to bear in mind that the aspect of affairs may change; that we may have to contend with worse harvests than that of this year; and that it may be wise to avail ourselves of the present moment to effect an adjustment which I believe must ultimately be made, and which could not be long delayed without engendering feelings of animosity among different classes of Her Majesty's subjects.' As he had a sincere conviction that the settlement could not be delayed, he should deeply lament the failure of measures intended to conduce to a 'friendly feeling between different classes—to provide additional security for the continuance of peace—and to maintain content and happiness at home by increasing the comforts and bettering the condition of the great body of the people.'

The Ministerial scheme of course excited the anger and the bitter denunciations of the Protectionists. The League, on the other hand, while welcoming the great changes proposed, still held to the chief article of their creed—total and immediate repeal.

Now arose that long course of vituperation of Sir Robert Peel in

which Mr. Disraeli bore so conspicuous a part. The Minister who had given way to the wishes of the people, and who had every inducement to retire into private life instead of taking upon himself the lead in the abrogation of the Corn Laws, was assailed with extraordinary personalities, and in a manner probably unprecedented in the career of a political leader.

But the work went forward. The debate on Sir Robert Peel's propositions was carried on by repeated adjournments for twelve nights. Upwards of one hundred speeches were delivered during the debate, forty-eight members speaking in favour of Free Trade, and fifty-five in favour of Protection. The Premier, in the middle of the debate, entered into an elaborate defence of his scheme, asking the House which should be its motto, 'Advance' or 'Retrograde.' He earnestly entreated the gentlemen of England to support these measures, by which they would take another guarantee for the content, and love, and willing obedience of the population. If a calamitous time should come, when they must offer to the mass of the people exhortations to bear their destiny with fortitude, it would be a consolation for them to reflect that they had relieved themselves from the necessity of regulating the supply of food in a time of famine; and that, in a period free from clamour and excitement, they had anticipated difficulty and removed every impediment to the free circulation of commerce. The Premier spoke on this occasion for nearly three hours, and in his best vein.

On the evening following this speech, Mr. Bright addressed the House. Having first demonstrated the necessity for measures of relief, he passed this glowing eulogium upon Sir Robert Peel:—

'You say the right hon. baronet is a traitor. It would ill become me to attempt his defence after the speech which he delivered last night—a speech, I will venture to say, more powerful and more to be admired than any speech which has been delivered within the memory of any man in this House. (Cheers.) I watched the right hon. baronet as he went home last night, and for the first time I envied him his feelings. That speech has circulated by scores of thousands throughout the kingdom and throughout the world; and wherever a man is to be found who loves justice, and wherever there is a labourer whom you have trampled under foot, that speech will bring joy to the heart of the one, and hope to the breast of the other. You chose the right hon. baronet—why? Because he was the ablest man of your party. You

always said so, and you will not deny it now. Why was he the ablest? Because he had great experience, profound attainments, and an honest regard for the good of the country. You placed him in office. When a man is in office he is not the same man as when in opposition. The present generation, or posterity, does not deal as mildly with men in government as with those in opposition. There are such things as the responsibilities of office. Look at the population of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and there is not a man among you who would have the valour to take office and raise the standard of Protection, and cry "Down with the Anti-Corn-Law League, and Protection for ever!" There is not a man in your ranks who would dare to sit on that bench as the Prime Minister of England pledged to maintain the existing law. (Loud cheers.) The right hon. baronet took the only, the truest course—he resigned. He told you by that act, I will no longer do your work. I will not defend your cause. The experience I have had since I came into office renders it impossible for me at once to maintain office and the Corn Laws. The right hon. baronet resigned—he was then no longer your Minister. He came back to office as the Minister of his Sovereign and of the people—not the Minister of a class who first raised him into office for their own special and private purposes.' (Loud cries of Hear, hear.)

With regard to this speech, the *Sun* observed that the singularity of Mr. Bright's position, as he rose to address the Ministerialists and Oppositionists, seemed to animate him to an unwonted pitch of rhetorical excellence; his periods were, as usual, adroitly and elegantly turned; but, in addition to this, they alternately glittered with satire, and burnt and thrilled with a tone even pathetic. Those who sat near Sir Robert Peel observed that the tears started to his eyes at this unexpected generosity on the part of a political antagonist.

The first reading of the Premier's resolutions was ultimately carried by a majority of 337 to 240. When the House went into Committee, Mr. Villiers' amendment on the first clause, making the action of the bill immediate instead of prospective, was negatived by 265 to 78 votes. During the discussion, Mr. Bright made some allusions to the whining tone of the agriculturists, as exemplified in their speeches on that occasion. He recollected, he said, in one of Mr. Dickens's works, that he gave an account of an election to the dignified office of parish beadle, on which occasion the walls were covered with placards bearing the inscription, 'Vote for Scroggins and eleven small children.' There was scarcely, even in that, anything more pitiable than to witness the great landowners of the country coming to the House and talking of the encumbrances upon

upon their estates, or of the necessity of providing fortunes for their grown-up daughters. On the general question, he remarked that if they did not gain immediate repeal that session, they would have to discuss it every session until the law was fairly abolished.

After another fine speech by Sir Robert Peel, the second reading of the Corn Importation Bill was carried, on the 27th of March, by a majority of 88, in a House of 516. Although large Free-trade majorities were obtained at every stage, the Protectionists fought the measure stoutly on all points. At length, on the morning of the 16th of May, the third reading of the bill was carried in the House of Commons by a majority of 98 in a House of 556. It then went to the House of Lords, where it also passed after debates on various stages, and became law on the 25th of June. On the same day the Peel Ministry fell upon the Irish Coercion Bill. The Premier, in his speech on leaving office, delivered on the 29th, reviewed the course and policy of his Government, paid a warm tribute to Mr. Cobden, and closed with these memorable words: 'In relinquishing power, I shall leave a name, severely censured I fear by many who, on public grounds, deeply regret the severance of party ties—deeply regret that severance, not from interested or party motives, but from the firm conviction that fidelity to party engagements—the existence and maintenance of a great party—constitutes a powerful instrument of government. I shall surrender power severely censured also by others who, from no interested motive, adhere to the principle of Protection, considering the maintenance of it to be essential to the welfare and interests of the country: I shall leave a name execrated by every monopolist who, from less honourable motives, clamours for protection because it conduces to his own individual benefit; but *it may be that I shall leave a name sometimes remembered with expressions of goodwill in the abodes of those whose lot it is to labour, and to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, when they shall recruit their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened by a sense of injustice.*'

The words printed in italics were subsequently engraved upon

one of the numerous memorials erected to the eminent statesman who uttered them.

The work of the League having been now practically accomplished, that organisation was dissolved at a meeting held in the Manchester Town Hall on the 2d of July. Mr. G. Wilson chairman of the Council, briefly sketched the operations of the League from its commencement. He was followed by Mr. Cobden, who said it would be impossible ever again to impose the Corn Laws. Referring to the ex-Premier, he added, 'If he has lost office, he has gained a country. For my part, I would rather descend into private life with that last measure of his, which led to his discomfiture, in my hand, than mount to the highest pinnacle of human power.' Mr. Cobden then moved a resolution formally dissolving the League. This was seconded by Mr. Bright, who said that, under the circumstances of that meeting, he would be the very last man to utter one syllable of unworthy exultation over those who had been defeated. But he was of opinion that that final meeting might have some result beyond that of merely winding up the affairs of the League; that by it they might point a moral and learn a lesson; that they might contemplate the past, and to some extent look into the future. The public had learned that there was nothing which could be held out to the intelligent people of this kingdom which was so calculated to stimulate them to action—to united and persevering action—as a great and sacred principle like that which was espoused by the League. 'They have learned that there is in public opinion a power much greater than that residing in any particular form of government; that although you have in this kingdom a system of government which is called "popular" and "representative"—a system which is somewhat clumsily contrived, and which works with many jars and joltings—that still, under the impulse of a great principle, with great labour and with great sacrifices, all those obstacles are overcome, so that out of a machine especially contrived for the contrary, justice and freedom are at length achieved for the nation; and the people have learned something beyond this, viz., that the way to freedom is henceforward not through violence and bloodshed.' The League would hence-



forth stand as a sign of a new order of things. It had come into conflict with the great proprietors of the soil, and the power of the landed aristocracy had succumbed to it. We had been living through a revolution without knowing it. Mr. Bright, alluding to Sir Robert Peel, said he rejoiced that it was one of themselves who had given the finishing stroke to that gigantic monopoly which they had opposed. The National Anti-Corn-Law League had been charged with all kinds of sinister ends, but now that its work was ended, the Crown was as safe and as popular as it had ever been ; while as for the House of Lords, he had a greater respect for it now than he ever had at any former period. They might also have a higher opinion of the House of Commons. The country, too, was in a much better position now than when the agitation commenced, for it had been taught that justice between man and man was really the principle on which legislation ought to take place. In conclusion, Mr. Bright said : ‘We need not raise monuments of stone, or of brass, or of any such durable material, to the honour of this League. If we have not been mistaken during the seven years we have worked, if we are not mistaken now—and I think I may say for all who have been working in this cause that we not only do not believe that we are mistaken, but we are confirmed in our conviction that we shall find the result of this measure in extended freedom and increased security, not only for property, but for labour, and for the rewards and enjoyments which are procured by labour ; and I trust and believe—I speak conscientiously, and after years of consideration—I believe that we have cleared away the greatest obstacle in the path of the people ; that we now stand on the threshold of a new career ; and that if the spirit, the energy, and the intelligence, the great and noble qualities of which we boast ourselves the possessors, and which to some extent have been exhibited in the working of this League—if we still bring those qualities into action, I know not that there is any height to which this nation may not aspire ; and I know not but that in all good things we may lead forward other nations on the same career.’

The resolution was carried with loud cheers, and votes of thanks were then passed to the officers of the League. A sum of £10,000

was voted to the chairman, Mr. George Wilson, who had systematically declined to receive a farthing of remuneration for his services. It is stated that as the meeting drew towards its close, a feeling of grave solemnity stole over the five hundred gentlemen present. Those who had so often met together during the great contest would never meet under similar circumstances again. Mr. Cobden reminded them that they were under obligations to the Queen, who was said to have favoured their cause as one of humanity and justice; and, with three loyal and hearty cheers in her honour, the meeting dissolved.

Celebrations in honour of the repeal of the Corn Laws took place in various parts of the country. Mr. Bright's native town of Rochdale was conspicuous in its rejoicings. There was a procession embracing some twelve thousand people, and after this the manufacturers and other employers treated their workpeople to sumptuous dinners. In the evening a meeting of Messrs. Bright's workpeople was held in the schoolroom attached to the mill. Mr. Jacob Bright took the chair, and Mr. Elihu Burritt, the 'learned blacksmith,' who had just arrived from the United States, spoke of the great victory which had been achieved—a victory far more noble than the sanguinary one of Waterloo. Mr. John Bright also addressed the gathering, and while he predicted a better state of things now that the Corn Law was gone, he reminded his hearers that people could not live without work, or have large incomes without toiling at some honest industry. But there would be a great demand for labour, and a more regular income for those who lived by labour, 'if in both classes of employers and employed,' said Mr. Bright, 'we cultivate feelings of justice and kindness to each other, sympathy and honour and respect for each other. I do look forward to a great and striking and permanent improvement in this district; and if there be political institutions which it may become us, before long, to struggle to remove, I trust that as we have struggled for this great blessing, and achieved this great conquest, we may struggle in a like spirit of harmony for other things that are before us; and that, whilst endeavouring to improve the state of matters around us, we may look into our homes and houses and cottages, that we may educate our

children, and with all cordial sympathy and co-operation spread amongst the whole society of which we are members greater intelligence, greater morality, greater virtue; and then with these there must inevitably be greater and more enduring happiness.'

Mr. Bright's Durham constituents invited him to a banquet, in order to testify their admiration of his independent and honourable conduct, his efficient services in Parliament, and above all, his 'eminent advocacy of the recent important national measure.' The Mayor presided, and the hon. member, in responding to the toast of his health, said he took that meeting as an evidence that he had not altogether left unfulfilled the promises and expectations which he held out three years ago. Dealing with the great measure which had just been achieved, he said that such revolutions were not to be effected by merely vapouring about freedom. 'There have been demagogues in this country whose hands are never out of their kid gloves, and whose feet are always in boots of janned leather. (Laughter.) Now these are the men who can never obtain such triumphs as have been obtained this year. It requires that they should not only themselves be the advocates of a just policy, but also that they should show their willingness to make sacrifices, and to work continually until the public mind is leavened and saturated with the truths they would teach; and this is the only way in this age whereby great and beneficial changes can be effected. I do not wish to boast of myself, and all those with whom I acted, but I do think that when men for many years have seen the necessity of the application of a great principle, and have devoted themselves without intermission to its establishment, and at length succeeded against the most tremendous obstacles—I do think they have a right to look to their fellow-countrymen for some degree of approval—that at least they are men entitled to be heard when they express their opinions on any great national or political question.'

Mr. Cobden, who had sacrificed his business in order to further the great cause he had at heart, was presented by the Free-traders of the kingdom with the sum of £75,000. At a later period, and at a time of great anxiety, he was presented with a further sum of £40,000. Mr. Bright also was presented with a valuable memento of

the services he had rendered to the League. The subscription set on foot having resulted in a sum of upwards of £5000, this was expended in the purchase of a library of 1200 volumes—the selection of the works being left to Mr. Bright—and a large, handsome oak bookcase to contain them, which runs the length of the library at 'One Ash. The design of the bookcase recalls the Free-trade struggle. The supports between the large glass panels are elegantly carved into sheaves of corn, and surmounting the cornice is a relief showing a vessel homeward bound—the burden of the design being 'Free Trade in Corn.'

There was a temporary revival of the League in 1852, on the accession to office of Lord Derby's strongly-protectionist Government. There was some danger of reactionary legislation, and the Council of the League and its chief supporters were summoned to meet again in Manchester, there to confer upon the condition of public affairs. Mr. Cobden proposed a resolution reconstituting the League, in consequence of the advent of Lord Derby's Ministry to power. Amongst other resolutions carried was one moved by Mr. Bright, to the effect that a memorial to the Queen, praying for an immediate dissolution of Parliament, be signed by the Chairman on behalf of the meeting, and transmitted for presentation to Her Majesty. Mr. Bright said, alluding to the demand that they should give the new Government a fair trial, 'We have been trying them all our lives. We have tried both them and the Corn Law, and so far as they are connected with that question, we say that a party more hostile to the true rights of this country, more revolutionary in its character, never held the reins of office.' It was their first duty to drive them from the offices where they had no right whatsoever to be. The Government was one which, on a question of industrial freedom, 'had not and could not have any sympathy with either the wants or wishes or interests of the population of the great towns and cities of the United Kingdom. He had not the shadow of a doubt that if the question were put fairly to the constituencies, a large majority would, in 1852, ratify, confirm, and seal for ever the policy which was adopted in 1846. Throughout all ranks and classes in the country, the conviction was spreading

that not only was the comfort of millions of homes increased, but that the political and social safety of the country during the past four years had been owing in a large degree to the policy of 1846.

Subscriptions were called for, and in a very short time a sum of nearly £70,000 was subscribed. Though the fears of the League were not groundless, the general election saved them another long campaign. Parliament was dissolved on the 1st of July, and the new House was so largely composed of Free-traders, that all fears of Protectionist legislation were speedily at an end. Lord Derby's Government was succeeded by the Coalition Ministry of the Earl of Aberdeen.

A recent writer, Mr. A. Mongredien, dealing with the general results of Free Trade upon the commerce of the country, has observed that 'just as the Free-trade system enabled us to take the utmost possible advantage of the period of prosperity, so it has enabled us to meet the phase of reaction and adversity with less strain on our resources than any of the protected countries.' Any change, therefore, in the direction of Protection would prove in the highest degree inexpedient and disastrous. The great lesson we should learn is to be prepared for those fluctuations in trade which must inevitably occur, and not to act in seasons of prosperity as though there would never more be a season of adversity. The writer whom we have just quoted has also clearly proved, by arguments and statistics, the following, amongst other propositions:—'That Free Trade is the only system under which capital and labour find their most natural and profitable fields for employment. That the protective system transfers capital and labour from natural and profitable into forced and unprofitable employments, artificially raises the cost of commodities, forfeits the advantages accruing from the division of labour, reduces foreign trade, and tends to isolate a country from the rest of the world. That the reciprocity or retaliatory system, were it practicable (and it is not), would be fraught with all the evils of protection, of which it is the reproduction under another name.'

M. Chevalier, who was entertained by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce in May 1875, referred in terms of high praise to the

League and its leaders. Of the latter he said, 'The names of these men, so deserving to be preserved for ages, ought to be inscribed in letters of gold on the walls of the meeting room of the Chamber of Commerce of Manchester. The first name would be that of Richard Cobden; next would come the name of John Bright; and the President of that evening, Mr. Edmund Ashworth, partook with his brother, Henry Ashworth, the honour of having been from the first one of the most devoted and most resolute members of the League.'

This eulogium was not exaggerated, for the good which these reformers did will live after them through many generations. The National Anti-Corn-Law League laboured on behalf of humanity, and by humanity it has already been crowned. As regards the subject of our biography, and his relation to that great movement, there is no episode in his career which, in the eyes of posterity, will reflect greater lustre upon his name.

## CHAPTER VIII.

*ELECTION FOR MANCHESTER.—PERSONAL DETAILS.*

The General Election of 1847.—Mr. Bright returned for Manchester.—Scene at the Hustings.—Speech of the New Member.—Moral of his Election.—Mr. Bright's Second Marriage.—His Family.—Death of his child Leonard.



PARLIAMENT was dissolved in the year 1847, under circumstances devoid of any unusual political excitement. There was, it is true, considerable interest manifested in various individual contests, but as the old Parliament had died a natural death on the completion of its full constitutional term, and as there were no great party questions demanding immediate settlement, the election generally was one of the quietest on record. Some well-known political characters voluntarily relinquished Parliamentary honours at this juncture; while a few others, including the brilliant orator and statesman Macaulay, were rejected by their former constituents.

About nine months before the dissolution, the Liberals of Manchester prepared for the eventuality of a contest. With singular unanimity, they resolved upon securing Mr. John Bright, if possible, as their representative in the ensuing Parliament. The Manchester Reform Association met on the 14th of October 1846, and resolved that a deputation should wait upon the hon. member for Durham, formally requesting him to offer himself as a candidate. Mr. Bright agreed to be put in nomination if the recommendation of the Association should be endorsed by the electors. He also wrote a letter from Rochdale on the 15th, in which he said: 'I am induced to consent to become a candidate for the suffrages of the electors of Manchester in the belief that to a large extent my sentiments accord

with theirs, and because my sympathies are bound up in an especial manner with the advancement of the interests of that great and industrious population of which Manchester may be deemed the centre.'

The choice of the Association was a natural and reasonable one, Mr. Bright being closely identified with Manchester interests. An aggregate gathering of the electors was held in the Free Trade Hall, on the 18th of the same month, in order to endorse the selection. Mr. G. Wilson presided. Mr. Bright, having been formally nominated, addressed the meeting. 'It may be thought I have no qualification,' he said, 'which should entitle me to ask for the suffrages of any of the electors of Manchester. I said before, that accident had made me a public man; that I had no desire to leave the occupation in which I had been brought up; and I can say now that home and domestic claims have to me lost none of their relish. It would be to me personally no discomfort that not you alone, but every constituency in the kingdom, should think that I was not qualified from my opinions to represent them.'

It is curious to note how Mr. Bright still shrank from coming forward prominently as a public man, although opinion had now become universal that he was well qualified for such a position. Continuing his address, he remarked: 'I can assure this meeting that there is scarcely any occupation in life which is a more chequered one—which has more of trouble to balance its delights, more of suffering to compensate for its enjoyments, than that of an honest representative of the people. But if this meeting, and after this meeting the still larger body of the electors whom you may be supposed to represent, should think me a fit person to speak in your name in the British House of Commons, I will not shrink from the heavy, the onerous duties which that appointment would impose upon me. I cannot boast of blood and ancestry. My ancestry were people who followed an honourable industry—such as I myself should have preferred always to follow—such as you follow now, and such as your forefathers followed. My sympathies are naturally with the class with which I am connected, and I would infinitely prefer to raise the class of which I am one, than by any means



whatever to creep above it or out of it. If I am elected, I can only promise you zeal which I think few can surpass me in for those great public questions with which I have been connected, and for those principles which I have espoused; and it will be to me ample compensation for any labour I may endure, for any obloquy I may meet with, for any suffering I may undergo, if in years to come—if years to come should be granted me—I may be able to look back and reflect that I have done something for the furtherance of those great principles and objects with which the name of Manchester is so gloriously identified.'

This frank and outspoken statement was received with great favour, the whole audience rising *en masse* and cheering vigorously. Mr. Bright's candidature now became an actual fact, and meetings were frequently held in its support, many of which the candidate himself attended. The Conservatives at first indulged a hope of contesting the representation, and an application was made to Lord Lincoln, son of the Duke of Newcastle, to come forward. His lordship made some inquiries, however, as to the result of the Conservative canvass, and finding that the support promised was not sufficient to justify him in coming forward, he wisely declined to put his friends to the expense of a useless contest.

The election took place on the 29th of July, in St. Ann's Square, and for the first time in the history of the borough it was not contested. Some ten thousand persons were present in front of the hustings. Although extremely popular with a large portion of the constituency, there were even some Liberals, or rather Whigs, who opposed Mr. Bright's candidature. Then there was a portion of the working classes who did not approve of his views on factory legislation. The presence of this element led to Mr. Bright being disturbed in his speech on the hustings; but the great majority of those present were with him. It is in the power of a hundred persons to spoil the enjoyment and comfort of ten thousand; and by one such small band of obstructionists—incited, it was understood, purposely to the work—the proceedings at the Manchester election were rather disagreeably diversified.

The Mayor, Mr. Elkanah Armitage, having opened the proceed-

ings, Mr. Alderman Watkin nominated the Right Hon. T. Milner Gibson as a fit and proper person to represent the constituency in Parliament, and Mr. Alderman Walker seconded the motion. Mr. George Wilson then nominated Mr. Bright, observing that he should feel insulted if any man asked him whether Mr. Bright's votes had not always been in favour of popular rights and social progress. Civil and religious freedom was the motto of his party. Mr. Absalom Watkin, in seconding the nomination, said: 'In electing Mr. Bright you will return a member peculiarly fitted for the work he has to do; in electing him you will confer upon him the highest honour the people can bestow upon one of themselves, for there is no greater honour a man can desire than that of being the unbought representative of such a constituency as that of Manchester. You will elevate him to a degree of importance and influence in the House of Commons proportionate to the wealth and independence of this great constituency; you will give him a distinguished place among the representatives of the people, and he will enter the House of Commons unfettered by any pledges, but guided by known principles and strict integrity, prepared to battle with the enemies of the people, and anxious to effect social and political improvements.

The Mayor declared Mr. Gibson and Mr. Bright duly elected, there being no other candidate. Mr Gibson first addressed the vast audience, and then Mr. Bright came forward. He was warmly cheered by his supporters, but the small knot of operatives already mentioned had collected in front of the hustings, and they were evidently bent on creating a disturbance. When the hon. member could be heard above the uproar, his language was of that bold and fearless character it has ever been. 'I am not afraid,' he said, 'to meet any portion of the inhabitants of this town; I have never deceived you, I have never flattered you, and I owe you nothing but for the good opinion of me which you have manifested. You owe me nothing, but that I have endeavoured to do something in your service. I should be ashamed to stand here if I did not believe that I am the representative, not only of the electors of Manchester, but of the interests of the vast majority of the working

population of this town.' The confusion now increased, but Mr. Bright could be heard to say, 'I differ from some of you in opinion, but I am not the less entitled to a fair and impartial hearing from you. I am willing to answer to every individual here for any political opinion I hold, for any vote I have ever given, for any speech I have ever made. If it be the will of a small part of this vast assembly to prevent any expression of opinion, their fellow-townsmen will know that they at least are not the friends of freedom, however much they may quarrel with me.'

At this point, according to the Manchester journals, a rather alarming incident occurred. The onward pressure of the multitude caused the crossbeam from the centre of the barrier rails to the central upright of the hustings to break away from its fastening. The barrier was broken, in spite of the united force of the policemen to keep it in its position. For a moment there was a backward movement of the multitude, but again came the onward pressure, and the police, imagining that the peace was about to be broken, drew their staves before anything could be said to prevent them, and by a free use of them upon the heads of the foremost ranks of the crowd cleared a space in front of the hustings to the depth of twelve yards, in less time than it occupies to record it. Further violence was prevented by the interposition of the Mayor, the Town Clerk, and other gentlemen on the hustings. The people were subsequently allowed to approach the platform. The Mayor made a vain appeal for order, the animus of the noisy portion of the assemblage being but too evident.

Mr. Bright, resuming, said: 'Although there are here many of the operative classes who consider me to be their enemy, I would rather have their ill-will now, while defending their interests, than have their ill-will hereafter, because I had betrayed them. Whether in Parliament or out, whether receiving your hisses or your cheers, I shall still fight for those principles which I have already on many occasions explained to you; and you will find me in the House of Commons just as much your honest representative, and the defender of the rights of the working classes, as of the electors of this town. Gentlemen, I feel confident that of the ten thousand persons here

assembled, there are not one hundred men who would not have listened to the arguments and statements which their candidates and members might have to utter. I am blamed here because I did not give my assent to a measure which I believed to be injurious to the operatives themselves. I am blamed because I opposed the Ten Hours' Bill—because I did not consent that Parliament should interfere to close the manufactories of this country for two hours' per day. I may have been wrong, but if wrong I am wrong in ignorance, and not in intention. I boldly stated my intention to oppose that measure; I have fearlessly expressed my opinion; I have spoken and I have voted in accordance with that opinion, and I am now ready to maintain it. But hereafter we shall have an opportunity of seeing who is right—the advocates of that measure, or its opponents. If it prove a piece of successful legislation, I shall rejoice; if it be not, I shall be willing to help in its amendment.'

From this frank claim to independence of opinion upon a particular piece of legislation, Mr. Bright passed on to other topics. Alluding to the recent creation of a bishopric of Manchester, he said he regretted that it was not in his power to give a vote in opposition to that 'calamity' which had befallen the town. 'My right hon. colleague, Mr. Gibson, says that he should sleep comfortably if no more bishops had been made; my slumbers would be unbroken if the bishops that are made were to be unmade. I never yet saw any good that the bishops did; I have seen the multitudinous mischiefs that the bishops have done. I believe that hierarchies, state-manufactured clergies, are in themselves evils, and that the time will come when they will be no more known on the face of the earth than some of those great creatures of which we have remnants left, which lived before the flood.' Mr. Bright further said that before he went to Parliament at all he was a politician, simply because he saw great wrongs inflicted upon the country; he became an active man in politics because he felt it right to use his influence to obtain a redress of those wrongs. During the four years he had sat in Parliament, he had never given a vote he would not give again; he had never expressed any opinion which he did not honestly hold; and he would pursue again undeviatingly the same course he had hitherto

done. 'I trust,' said the hon. member in conclusion, 'that if at a future time I shall be permitted to render an account of the stewardship which has this day been committed to my hands, that I shall be able to give a good account of it; that I shall be able to say I have abandoned no opinion that I hold; that I have betrayed no man's confidence; that I have not, for anything that Ministers or parties can offer, sacrificed any of those convictions which are dear to me; and that I have, to the best of my power, fulfilled honestly and conscientiously the duties of one of the representatives of the borough of Manchester.'

The proceedings shortly afterwards concluded. Manchester had gained a representative who was to find a more important status in political life than he had hitherto taken; and yet his relations with that distinguished constituency were destined only to last for a period of ten years. The reasons for his severance will be dealt with in their proper order.

Meantime the friends of progress in the northern city congratulated each other upon their new representative, elected without opposition. This election alone showed the enormous strides which Mr. Bright's principles had made. 'Few facts in the modern history of this country,' wrote the *Manchester Times*, 'are more illustrative of the large futurity they enclose than the simple record we have this day to make of the unopposed election of John Bright to the representation of Manchester. This record marks an era in the history of principles. It is characteristic of the new life that is moving the body politic. It proclaims a *great fact*,—a fact greater by the future it represents than the past which it realises. Unostentatious as the triumph may be, its significance is the deeper on that account. Manchester stands forth to the country and the world, quietly crowning the new alliance of industrial independence with political power. These are the victories that secure the safety of great principles. They embody, not matured opinion alone, but the moral testimony to its depth and strength in the national heart. They exalt political into practical moral truths, and certify the future supremacy of justice by demonstrating the power that supports it. They are the last vindication needed of the past,—the best of all

possible lessons to the statesmen of the future.' The electors were justified in looking to the future of Mr. Bright's career for a true and noble exemplification of what political disinterestedness, unswerving honesty, and unquestionable ability could do for the advancement and realisation of great principles. As he had begun—the tried friend of civil and religious liberty—so would he go forward, eager for every conflict where an anomaly was to be rectified, an act of justice to be done, or an abuse to be destroyed.

The year which saw Mr. Bright's election for Manchester witnessed also his second marriage. On the 10th of June 1847, he was united to Miss Margaret Elizabeth Leatham, daughter of Mr. William Leatham, of Heath House, Wakefield, the well-known West Riding banker. The marriage ceremony was performed in the meeting-house of the Friends, George Street, Wakefield. We shall make no apology for giving a brief description of the rite of marriage as observed by the Friends, from a local historian who records Mr. Bright's marriage. For those who are unfamiliar with the ceremony, the description will possess a general interest. The rite was severely simple. In accordance with the usages of the Friends, the marriage party sat for some time in silence, at the expiration of which Mr. Bright rose and took the right hand of Miss Leatham, pronouncing in low but distinct tones the formula of the Friends, as follows: 'Friends, I take my friend, Margaret Elizabeth Leatham, to be my wife, promising, by Divine assistance, to be unto her a loving and faithful husband till it shall please the Lord by death to separate us.' Miss Leatham then, still holding hands, repeated similar words regarding Mr. Bright, promising to be 'unto him a faithful and loving wife.' A brief space of silence next ensued, which was broken by one of the congregation offering up prayer, the whole assembly standing. Again there was a short period of silence, and then one of the company read the certificate or declaration, which was signed by the bride and bridegroom, and their relations and friends, and afterwards by a large number of the congregation. The whole ceremony occupied about an hour.

This union was blessed by a family of seven children. Mr. John Albert Bright, Mr. Bright's eldest son, was born on the 18th of

March 1848. There were afterwards born, from 1849 to 1863 inclusive, the following children : Mary Harriet, William Leatham, Anna Elizabeth, Margaret Sophia, Leonard, and Philip Bright. Of these, Leonard, a bright and promising child, died in his sixth year, on the 8th of November 1864, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Tudno, Llandudno. While Mr. Bright, accompanied by his family, was on a visit to his favourite seaside resort, his son was attacked by scarlatina, and died after an illness of four days. St. Tudno's church and graveyard are situate on the high promontory overlooking Llandudno, known as the Great Orme's Head. In this quiet graveyard—where no noise is heard save the dashing of the waves on the rocks beneath—there is a white marble headstone bearing the brief yet touching record, 'In loving remembrance of Leonard Bright (son of John Bright, M.P., and Margaret Elizabeth his wife), who died at Llandudno, November 8th, 1864. Aged nearly six years. "And there shall be one fold and one Shepherd."' The quiet graveyard of St. Tudno has of recent years had many visitants, besides those members of Mr. Bright's family, who have kept the memory of the little child that sleeps there fragrant with flowers.

## CHAPTER IX.

*IRISH QUESTIONS—1847-53.*

State of Ireland in 1847.—Government Measures.—Statesmanlike Speech by Mr. Bright.—Irish Debates in 1848.—Disestablishment recommended by Mr. Bright.—The Land Question.—Irish Difficulties.—Terrible Condition of the Country.—A Great Opportunity for English Statesmen.—Mr. Bright visits Ireland.—Receives an Address from the Irish Residents of Manchester and Salford in 1850.—Important Letter to Dr. Gray on the Irish Church.



THE state of Ireland in the year 1847 was most lamentable. Famine had done its deadly work upon thousands, and a large portion of the population were still in a most wretched and destitute condition. Legislation became imperative, and early in the session Lord John Russell unfolded the Government plans for the relief of the distress. They proposed, amongst other things, the reclamation of waste lands in Ireland, intending to devote a million sterling for this purpose; but this reclamation scheme was never carried out. The chief measure carried was the Poor Law Extension Act, which established an efficient Poor Law in Ireland, and compelled the land to provide for the relief of its own pauperism. Government also made useful provisions in the British American colonies for emigrants on landing, and engaged to facilitate their access to employment. That great calamity the failure of the potato crop had annihilated food to the amount of £16,000,000. Ministers were indemnified for the measures which, by anticipation of the sanction of Parliament, they had been compelled to take. The two Houses also passed a bill for advancing loans from the Treasury to certain Irish railways.

These measures effected a considerable amount of good, but when



the new Parliament assembled, towards the close of the year, Ireland was again the all-absorbing topic of discussion. It was now found that the previous remedial legislation required to be supplemented by measures to check the perpetration of crime in certain counties and districts in the sister country. Homicides and crimes of violence generally had increased to an alarming degree; and the almost daily occurrence of outrages in the disturbed districts called for immediate attention on the part of the Government. The Home Secretary, Sir George Grey, accordingly brought forward a Coercion Bill on the 29th of November, prefacing its introduction by a full exposition of the disorganised state of the country, and a description of the nature of the law by which it was proposed to repress the prevailing crimes and outrages. The Government had hoped, he said, that the late remedial measures would have drawn together the different classes of Irishmen in one common bond of unity, and would have taught them the value of mutual co-operation in promoting the peace, order, and prosperity of their common country. He for one was not yet prepared to abandon that hope; for the case he had to lay before the House applied only to a part of Ireland, and he was happy to state that in the greater portion of it crime had diminished, and life and property were as safe as in England. We need not enter into the Secretary's statistics showing that exceptional legislation was called for in exceptional districts; they were of the character which, unfortunately for Ireland, have had a periodical recurrence in her history.

To prove how necessary the measure was regarded, it may be mentioned that it was supported by such men as Mr. Brotherton, who had opposed every coercion bill which had hitherto been introduced in their time. The bill, notwithstanding, was contested at every stage, but the number of its opponents was exceedingly small, and several Irish representatives voted for it upon the ground that it was far from being of a very stringent character.

In the debate on the third reading, Mr. Bright delivered a statesmanlike speech, pointing out the true remedies to be applied in regard to Ireland. Having presented a petition against the bill, signed by more than 20,000 persons, inhabitants of Manchester, he

said he was unwilling to vote without giving the reasons which made it impossible for him to oppose the measure. The case of the Government, so far as the necessity for the bill was concerned, appeared to him to be as clear and as perfect as it could be. From the speech of the Home Secretary, from the unanimous statements of all the newspapers, and from the evidence of all parties connected with Ireland, it was placed beyond a doubt that in the disturbed districts of Ireland the ordinary law was utterly powerless. In England the people were in favour of carrying the law into effect, but in Ireland in certain districts opinion was depraved and thoroughly vitiated. Assassinations were not looked upon as murders, but rather as executions. It was clear, then, that the ordinary law had failed.

But Mr. Bright, after making these admissions, went on to maintain that the Government had not shown the courage which was necessary to deal effectually with the difficulties of Ireland. Lord John Russell had said that all parties were to blame for the misgovernment of Ireland; but he must remember that he was now in the position of a dictator on Irish questions. Then there was another fact to which he (Mr. Bright) would call attention. 'The Irish members complain, and very justly, of the past legislation of this House; but when we call to mind that there are 105 of them here, of whom 60 or 70 are of Liberal politics or opinions, and that about 30 of them are Repealers, and hold very strong views with regard to the mismanagement of Irish affairs in the Imperial Parliament, I think we have a right to complain that they have not laid on the table of the House any one measure which they believe to be necessary to the prosperity of their country.' He was quite sure that 105, or even 30, English members, sitting in a Parliament in Dublin, would have done something by working manfully together for their country. The Irish members were as much to blame as any others for the absence of good government in Ireland. The speaker continued:

'I will not, like them, complain of bad legislation, and propose no remedy. What is the condition of Ireland? Last year we voted millions to keep its population from starvation; and this year we have been asked for a further sum, but have not granted

it. We maintain a large army in Ireland, and an armed police, which is an army in everything but in name; and yet we have in that country a condition of things which is not to be matched in any other civilised country on the face of the earth, and which is alike disgraceful to Ireland and to us. The great cause of Ireland's calamities is that Ireland is idle. I believe it would be found, on inquiry, that the population of Ireland, as compared with that of England, do not work more than two days per week. Wherever a people are not industrious, and are not employed, there is the greatest danger of crime and outrage. Ireland is idle, and therefore she starves; Ireland starves, and therefore she rebels. We must choose between industry and anarchy; we must have one or the other in Ireland. This proposition I believe to be incontrovertible, and I defy the House to give peace and prosperity to that country until they set in motion her industry, create and diffuse capital, and thus establish those gradations of rank and condition by which the whole social fabric can alone be held together.'

The idleness of the people in Ireland, said Mr. Bright, was not wholly their fault. It was for the most part a forced idleness, for when Irishmen migrated to Lancashire and other districts, they worked as well as others. The great secret of their idleness at home was, that there was little or no trade in Ireland. The hon. gentleman went on to complain that the House had not as yet seen the Government Bill for the sale of encumbered estates in Ireland. There was a unanimous admission that the misfortunes of Ireland were connected with the question of the management of the land; and Government should now take their stand above all class interests. He was informed, on excellent authority, that in the province of Connaught there was not five per cent. of the land free from settlements of one kind or another, and that probably not one per cent. was free from mortgages. If that were true, it was idle to seek elsewhere for the source of the evils of Ireland. Patchwork legislation, speeches, loans, would not now succeed in reviving the industry of Ireland. It was the duty of Government, in the first place, to bring in a Sale of Estates Bill, and thus make it easy for landlords who wished to dispose of their estates to do so. They should bring in a bill to simplify the titles to land in Ireland. They should diminish temporarily, if not permanently, all stamp duties which hindered the transfer of landed property; and they should pass a law by which the system of entailing estates should for the future be prevented.

This last recommendation being received with laughter, Mr.

Bright assured his hearers that at some not distant day the entailment of estates would cease, not in Ireland, but in England also. An owner of property should be permitted to leave it to whomsoever he will, provided the individual were living when the will was made. 'Perhaps I shall be told that the laws of entail and primogeniture are necessary for the maintenance of our aristocratic institutions; but if the evils of Ireland spring from this source, I say, perish your aristocratic institutions rather than that a whole nation should be in this terrible condition. If your aristocratic families would rear up their children in habits of business, and with some notions of duty and prudence, these mischievous arrangements would not be required, and they would retain in their possession estates at least as large as is compatible with the interests of the rest of the community. If the laws of entail and primogeniture are sound and just, why not apply them to personal property as well as freehold? Imagine them in force in the middle classes of the community, and it will be seen at once that the unnatural system, if universal, would produce confusion, and confusion would necessitate its total abolition.'

Mr. Bright held that everything would be unavailing unless the fetters by which the land was now held were cleared away so that it might become the possession of real owners, and be made instrumental to the employment and sustentation of the people. Speaking as a representative from a county which suffered extremely from the condition of Ireland, he said that Lancashire was periodically overrun by the pauperism of Ireland; that it had suffered seriously from the pestilence imported; and that many of the evils hitherto attributed to the extension of manufactures in that county had arisen from the enormous immigration of a suffering and pauperised people driven for sustenance from their own country. In conclusion, he said—

'As a Lancashire representative, I protest most solemnly against a system which drives the Irish population to seek work and wages in this country and in other countries, when both might be afforded them at home. Parliament is bound to remedy this state of things. The present Parliament contains a larger number of men of business and of members representing the middle classes than any former Parliament. The present Government is essentially of the middle class—(a laugh)—and

its members have on many occasions shown their sympathy with it. Let the hon. gentleman laugh; but he will not deny that no Government can long have a majority in this House which does not sympathise with the great middle class of this country. If the Government will manfully and courageously grapple with the question of the condition of land in Ireland, they will, I am convinced, be supported by a majority of the members of this House; they will enable the strength and skill of Irishmen to be expended on their own soil, and lay the foundation of her certain prosperity by giving that stimulus and reward to industry which it cannot have in the present circumstances of that country. Sir, I feel it impossible to refuse my vote in favour of the bill now before us; but I am compelled to say that unless the Government will zealously promote measures in the direction I have indicated, they cannot hope long to retain the confidence of this House or of the country.'

The bill passed the House of Commons by a majority of 159, only fourteen members voting against it. A few days later it went through its various stages in the House of Lords and became law.

In the session of 1848 Mr. Bright again took part in the debates which arose on Irish questions. He twice spoke against the bill, introduced by Sir George Grey, known as the Crown and Government Security Bill, which had for its object the more effectual repression of seditious and treasonable proceedings. This bill was brought in partly in consequence of the Chartist agitation, and partly to meet the disturbed condition of things in Ireland. Mr. Bright held that it was quite within the right of an Englishman or an Irishman to discuss what form of government he would choose to live under; and he further maintained that when the Government brought forward these measures restricting the liberty of the subject they should accompany them by others devised for the welfare and amelioration of the people.

On the 25th of August Mr. Poulett Scrope brought forward the following resolution: 'That no future appropriation of moneys taken from general taxation be made in aid of the poor-rate of Irish unions except on condition—1. That it be expended in the productive employment of the able-bodied poor. 2. That repayment be secured by a lien on the property improved by the works, as well as on the rateable property of the union.' The motion was opposed by Lord John Russell, and it was eventually negatived without a division, but it enabled Mr. Bright to deliver an exposition of his views on the subject of the employment of the poor in Ireland. He admitted

in the outset that it was difficult to suggest adequate measures of Irish relief without causing two evils: first, the waste of a great portion of the money granted; and next, the demoralisation of a large number of those to whom the relief was given. For these reasons he made allowances for the Government. As this was the last opportunity he should have that session, he was anxious to explain briefly what he conceived to be the course which ought to be taken with regard to that country, to enable its population to place themselves in a position of comfort and independence. The past of Ireland was known to all; it was a tale of idleness, and poverty, and periodical insurrection. The present of Ireland was like the past, except that all its ordinary evils were exhibited in an aggravated form. But there were one or two points with regard to this subject to which he wished especially to ask the attention of the House. First, there was the effect which this state of things in Ireland had upon certain districts in England. In many of the towns of Lancashire, for example, there had been a great influx of Irish population, and although not a few of these persons were steady, respectable, and industrious, it was notorious that a portion of them were the opposite of this. Their influence on the native population was injurious, and crimes of violence had increased. Then there was another important point:

‘Driven forth by poverty, Irishmen emigrate in great numbers, and in whatever quarter of the world an Irishman sets his foot, there stands a bitter, an implacable enemy of England. That is one of the results of the widespread disaffection that exists in Ireland. There are hundreds of thousands—I suppose there are millions—of the population of the United States of America who are Irish by birth, or by immediate descent; and be it remembered, Irishmen settled in the United States have a large influence in public affairs. They sometimes sway the election of members of the Legislature, and may even affect the election of the President of the Republic. There may come a time when questions of a critical nature will be agitated between the Governments of Great Britain and the United States; and it is certain that at such a time the Irish in that country will throw their whole weight into the scale against this country, and against peace with this country. These are points which it is necessary to consider, and which arise out of the lamentable condition in which Ireland is placed.’

Mr. Bright thought that both the Government and the people of Ireland were at fault. Governments generally had been negligent

of Ireland. Difficulties arose, too, from the constitution of the Government. Both Houses of Parliament were almost exclusively aristocratic, and the Administration was necessarily the same. The condition of Ireland required two kinds of remedies—one political, the other social. With regard to the first, three-fourths of the Irish people had a total disbelief in the honesty and integrity of the Government of the country, and to remove this feeling some great measure or measures must be offered to them—measures which would act as a complete demonstration that bygones were to be bygones, and that henceforth new, generous, and equal principles of government were to be adopted. Then, too, there must be equality between the great religious sects in Ireland—between Catholic and Protestant. It was impossible that this equality could be much longer denied. There was a rumour that Government intended bringing forward a proposition for paying the Roman Catholic priests of Ireland; but it would be much more in accordance with political justice, and with the true interests of religion, to withdraw the Church Establishment from Ireland, and thus bring about perfect equality.

Having thus advocated Disestablishment nearly twenty years before the passing of Mr. Gladstone's great measure, Mr. Bright went on to say, with regard to the Parliamentary representation of Ireland, that from the experience of seventy-three days which he had spent in an examination of the subject whilst serving as a member of the Dublin Election Committee, he asserted most distinctly that such representation as existed was a fraud. He was quite confident that next session the questions of religious equality in Ireland and of Irish representation must receive a much more serious attention than they had obtained in any past session. The social remedies which were immediately possible were those having reference to the mode in which the land of Ireland was held or cultivated. 'It is a notorious fact that there are vast tracts of land in Ireland which, if left in the hands of nominal and bankrupt owners, will never, to the end of time, support the population which ought to live upon them. And it is on this ground that I must question the policy of measures for expending public money with a

view to the cultivation and reclamation of these lands.' The true solution of the matter was to get the lands out of the hands of men who were the nominal and not the real possessors. Mr. Bright again referred to the evils of entail and primogeniture, and closed with this appeal :—

'You have toiled at this Irish difficulty session after session, and some of you have grown almost from boyhood to grey-headed old men since it first met you in your legislative career; and yet there is not in ancient or modern history a picture so humiliating as that which Ireland presents to the world at this moment.

'Let the House, if it can, regard Ireland as an English country. Let us think of the eight millions of people, and of the million of them doomed to this intolerable suffering. Let us think of the half-million who, within ten years past, have perished miserably in the workhouses, and on the highways, and in their hovels—more, far more, than ever fell by the sword in any war this country ever waged. Let us think of the crop of nameless horrors which is even now growing up in Ireland, and whose disastrous fruit may be gathered in years and generations to come. Let us examine what are the laws and the principles under which alone God and nature have permitted that nations should become industrious and provident.

'I hope the House will pardon me if I have said a word that can offend any one. But I feel conscious of a personal humiliation when I consider the state of Ireland. I do not wish to puff nostrums of my own, though it may be thought I am opposed to much that exists in the present order of things; but whether it tended to advance democracy, or to uphold aristocracy, or any other system, I would wish to fling to the winds any prejudice I have entertained, and any principle that may be questioned, if I can thereby do one single thing to hasten by a single day the time when Ireland shall be equal to England in that comfort and that independence which an industrious people may enjoy, if the Government under which they live is equal and just.'

Mr. Scrope's motion was eventually negatived without a division. The Government introduced several Irish measures in the session of 1849, the chief of which was a proposition by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a Rate in Aid. It was during the debate on the bill founded upon Sir Charles Wood's resolution that Mr. Bright delivered one of the greatest of his many elaborate speeches on Irish questions. The Chancellor of the Exchequer first proposed that a sum of £50,000 should be granted to certain Irish unions in which distress was more than usually prevalent. He further proposed that in each of the two following years there should be paid by every union in Ireland a sum equal to the rate of sixpence in the pound on each electoral division in such union,



towards a general fund for the relief of the poor in Ireland, and that the sum should be applied in such manner as Parliament might direct. The second reading of the bill founded on these resolutions was moved on the 27th of March, and the debate was prolonged till the 3d of April, when the second reading was carried by 193 to 138. The third reading, which was also opposed, was carried on the 30th of April, and the bill subsequently passed the House of Lords.

Mr. Bright opened the third night's debate on the second reading. He began by justifying the proposed rate, not on the ground of the necessity of the case, but on the ground that Great Britain had already paid its rate in and on account of Ireland to an amount greater than the sum now proposed to be levied from Ireland herself. This the hon. member conclusively showed by poor-rate statistics drawn from Glasgow and Manchester. The latter town had suffered severely, yet had uttered no loud or clamorous complaints respecting the excessive burden borne by them for the support of the Irish. Seeing that all the English manufacturing towns had paid no small sums for Irish paupers, he did think that the landowners and persons of property in Ireland should make an effort during a temporary period to supply that small sum which the present bill demanded from them. As to the objections entertained against the measure by the proprietors of Ulster, if the bill could succeed in making Ulster a part of Ireland in interests and sympathies, it would be attended with a very happy result, and one that would compensate for some portion of the present misfortunes of Ireland. Ulster men had stood in the way of improvements in the franchise, in the Church, and in the land question; they had purchased Protestant ascendancy, and the price paid for it was the ruin and degradation of their country.

With regard to the proposal emanating from certain quarters to substitute an income-tax for the purpose for which the rate was intended, Mr. Bright said he was averse to this proposition; he had insuperable objections to raising an income-tax for the support of the poor. But had such a tax been proposed, he was certain that it would have been opposed as much as the rate in aid had been, and,

in his judgment, opposed on much better grounds. Looking at the general question, in its connection with the whole state of Ireland, he was led to think that either the malady of that country was incurable, or that there was a great lack of statesmen in the House. Ireland had for ages been entirely governed through its landlords. The pernicious principle on which it had been ruled through them was still in practical operation. The pivot on which the Government of Ireland had turned, and on which it still continued to revolve, was that of force and alms. They had 50,000 armed men in that country to keep the people down; and they were annually voting away large sums of money to keep them up,—in other words, to keep them alive. He presumed that government by troops was easy, and that the

‘Civil power may snore at ease,  
While soldiers fire—to keep the peace.’

Tried by its fruits, this system was a palpable failure. And what alterations in the system were now proposed with a view to better results? As a measure for the regeneration of Ireland, the Poor Law had proved a complete failure, and so would the rate in aid. Something more was necessary—something which, instead of dealing with its mere symptoms, would attack the disease at its very root. At present, the rich were menaced with ruin, and the poor with starvation. The speaker then gave the following terrible picture of the condition of Ireland:—

‘On looking over the reports of the Poor Law Inspectors, I find them teeming with statements of the wretchedness which prevails in the distressed districts of Ireland. The general character of the reports is that starvation is, literally speaking, gradually driving the population into their graves. Many cannot quit their hovels for want of clothing, whilst others cannot be discharged from the workhouses owing to the same cause. Men are seen wearing women’s apparel, not being able to procure proper clothing; whilst, in other instances, men, women, and children are all huddled together under bundles of rags, unable to rise for lack of covering; workhouses and prisons are crowded beyond their capacity to contain, the mortality being very great in them. Persons of honest character commit thefts in order to be sent to prison, and some ask, as a favour, to be transported.

‘I know of nothing like this in the history of modern times. The only parallel I can find to it is in the work of the great German author, Mosheim, who, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, speaking of the inroads of the barbarians into the Roman empire in the fifth century, says that in Gaul the calamities of the times drove

many to such madness, that they wholly excluded God from the government of the world, and denied His providence over human affairs. It would almost appear that this state of things is now to be seen in Ireland. The prisons are crowded, the chapels deserted, society is disorganised and ruined ; labour is useless, for capital is not to be had for its employment. The reports of the Inspectors say that this catastrophe has only been hastened, and not originated, by the failure of the potato crop during the last four years, and that all men possessed of any intelligence must have foreseen what would ultimately happen.'

Mr. Bright next referred to the radical improvements required with regard to the titles and transfer of lands. Extravagance and the prevalence of life interests in property were also sources of evil in Ireland. Asking what the noble lord at the head of the Government had done towards grappling with these evils, he answered—Nothing, absolutely nothing. He held that the Government was highly reprehensible in not having come forward with some large and earnest measures for the regeneration of Ireland. The plan proposed by Sir Robert Peel with regard to the land and other matters was in its main features admirable, although he was inclined to regard it as a little vague in the shape in which it had been proposed. The right hon. baronet seemed to shrink from throwing a great deal of Irish land at once into the market, as such a course would lower its price. But he could assure the right hon. baronet that neither Englishmen nor Scotchmen would invest their capital in Irish land unless it were very cheap. Mr. Bright then proceeded to review the whole system of real property tenure in Ireland, inveighing against the strict and cumbrous system of entails existing in that country, against the law of primogeniture and its consequences, against complicated titles, and the pride and extravagance of the Irish gentry. He suggested reforms in all these directions, and when told that he was interfering with property, he asked what value Ireland was now, while the property in labour of four million persons was almost totally destroyed? In the state of the land question lay the real difficulty of the country. They must free the land, and facilitate its transfer, ere they could hope to effect anything like a permanent regeneration of Ireland. To do so was no doubt somewhat difficult ; but there were modes in which it might speedily be done.

‘If ever there were an opportunity for a statesman,’ said Mr. Bright, ‘it is this. This is the hour undoubtedly, and we want the man.’ He feared whether he was on the Treasury bench, but the character of the Government was at stake, and it could not remain inactive. Having alluded to the great subscription raised for Ireland three years before, when contributions came from all parts of the globe, the hon. member concluded with this eloquent peroration:—

‘Hon. gentlemen turn with triumph to neighbouring countries, and speak in glowing terms of our glorious constitution. It is true that abroad thrones and dynasties have been overturned, whilst in England peace has reigned undisturbed. But take all the lives that have been lost in the last twelve months in Europe amidst the convulsions that have occurred—take all the cessation of trade, the destruction of industry, all the crushing of hopes and hearts, and they will not compare for an instant with the agonies which have been endured by the population of Ireland under your glorious constitution. And there are those who now say that this is the ordering of Providence. I met an Irish gentleman the other night, and, speaking upon the subject, he said that he saw no remedy, but that it seemed as if the present state of things were the mode by which Providence intended to solve the question of Irish difficulties. But let us not lay these calamities at the door of Providence; it were sinful in us, of all men, to do so. God has blessed Ireland—and does still bless her—in position, in soil, in climate; He has not withdrawn His promises, nor are they unfulfilled; there is still the sunshine and the shower, still the seedtime and the harvest; and the affluent bosom of the earth yet offers sustenance for man. But man must do his part—we must do our part—we must retrace our steps—we must shun the blunders, and, I would even say, the crimes of our past legislation. We must free the land; and then we shall discover, and not till then, that industry, hopeful and remunerated—industry, free and inviolate, is the only sure foundation on which can be reared the enduring edifice of union and of peace.’

This speech marked Mr. Bright's advancement into the highest rank of Parliamentary orators and debaters. At its close, cheers burst forth spontaneously from all parts of the House, Conservatives vieing with Liberals in their appreciation of the eloquence which had deeply moved the entire chamber. Mr. Disraeli, who spoke on the same evening, said that although he agreed with Mr. Bright as little as with any member in the House, he had listened to his speech with pleasure and gratification, as he must to every demonstration which sustained the reputation of that assembly.

Before the House met in the following session, viz., 1850, Mr. Bright paid a visit to Ireland. In the questions which subsequently

arose in Parliament relating to the distressed unions, the elective franchise, &c., he took a lively interest, pointing out defects in the various measures introduced, although not addressing the House at any length upon the general question of Ireland. On the subject of the franchise, however, he spoke very emphatically, and said he should feel ashamed to own himself a citizen of this country did he believe it possible that, for any length of time, it could be tolerated that six men out of seven should be shut out from the ordinary exercise of the common right of the franchise. The Government Bill for the extension of the Irish Parliamentary franchise was carried this year, having been first subjected to considerable revision in the House of Lords. There were three important points in the measure, however, when it finally became law—namely, it fixed the franchise for Irish counties at £12, instituted a poor-law valuation, and required the payment of poor-rates as the only test of qualification. This Act increased the number of electors in the counties from 27,000 to 135,000.

Mr. Bright made some important references to the Irish Church during a debate which occurred in the session of 1853, on a motion by Mr. G. H. Moore for a select committee to inquire into the ecclesiastical revenues of Ireland, with the view of ascertaining how far they were made applicable to the benefit of the Irish people. Lord John Russell delivered a speech on this motion which was very illiberal as compared with his previous utterances on the question, and one which greatly exasperated the Roman Catholics and the Nonconformists. Mr. Bright expressed the sorrow with which he had listened to the noble lord's address, and proceeded to contrast his lordship's past career with his present, when he was cheered by those who sat opposite, and listened to in silence by those who sat behind him. With regard to the general question, he (Mr. Bright) said that if this kingdom of Great Britain, powerful in population, in wealth, and in the combination of all its people, were to inflict upon a smaller island and its smaller population a great injustice like the Irish Church, and to maintain that injustice on the ground that it would affect some of the institutions of this country, were he an Irishman, nothing but the impracticability of carrying the proposition

would for one single moment keep him from being as zealous a repealer of the Union as that island had ever produced. At the present moment it was impossible for any impartial person to travel through Ireland and not perceive that there was one question which poisoned all the social relations of that country. Whether in the elections, or in any other matter, political or social, this one question of the Church Establishment was the pestilent and poisonous question in Ireland, and made it as impossible now as for the last two hundred years that that country should be in the possession of tranquillity and contentment. He advised the Irish Liberal members to make this question of religious equality in Ireland the cardinal question in their political movements. Were he a Roman Catholic, he would not come into that House and let any occasion slip of denouncing the insult offered to his Church and his country. There was goodness and there was greatness enough in the people of this country yet to consent to a measure of full justice to Ireland.

Although Mr. Moore's motion was rejected by a large majority, this stirring and uncompromising language on the part of the member for Manchester must have greatly fluttered and discomposed the occupants of the Treasury bench, most of whom felt that there were striking anomalies in connection with the Irish Church. Mr. Bright was accurate in his reading of the people of England, but they required to be acted upon yet more strongly before this great act of reparation could be achieved.

Towards the close of 1849, Mr. Bright advocated the claims of Ireland at a great meeting in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester. He showed that for thirty years past the imperial Legislature had had laid before it, time after time, a statement of the actual condition of the Irish people; and he brought it as a serious charge against the constitution of the country—against the aristocratic form of our government—that all these statements had passed unregarded, and that the condition of Ireland had scarcely, until recently, excited any real solicitude on the part of either the Ministry or Parliament.

Mr. Bright has never used soft words or delusive phrases when it has seemed necessary to him to speak out, but his address on this occasion—by its very outspokenness—drew upon him the vials of

wrath from a not uninfluential portion of the press. He was charged with fostering that want of self-reliance which had always been complained of as lacking in the Irish people; whereas his only object had been to take away from those who had done evil to Ireland that subterfuge under which they had constantly sheltered themselves, viz., that there was something in the race and religion of Irishmen which made it impossible for their country to prosper.

The hon. gentleman's advocacy of the cause of Ireland, however, and his steadfast devotion to its interests, was warmly appreciated by the vast body of Irish residents in Manchester and Salford; and by these he was presented with an address in the Manchester Corn Exchange, on the 4th of January 1850. The address expressed the deep gratitude of the Irish residents, and expressed a hope that Mr. Bright might be enabled still further to brighten the path to Ireland's prosperity and England's glory. Mr. Bright delivered a lengthy speech in reply, recapitulating his previous suggestions and recommendations for a settlement of the most pressing of Irish grievances. The labourers and the peasantry of Ireland were almost gone—they were either dead, or in America, or in the workhouse. Irishmen had no country; and his propositions went to give them a country. The proposal which had been made in certain quarters to re-enact the Corn Laws surpassed in audacity any other made by those who professed to seek the welfare of Ireland. It was made by a body of coroneted conspirators against the food and the industry of the people of the United Kingdom. Having dwelt at length upon the necessity for land reform, religious equality, and a further extension of the suffrage, he thus recapitulated the three branches of remedies which he considered necessary for the welfare of Ireland: the economical, which took in the question of the land and the security of the tenantry—all those points which could be said to affect the industrial and social condition of the people; the political, affecting the franchise and the representation; and the ecclesiastical, which involved such a change as to place all the religious sects of Ireland upon a platform of perfect equality before the law. 'I hope,' said Mr. Bright, in conclusion, 'that Lord John Russell may rise to the great work that is before him. He has an opportunity of

doing more for this country than almost any other Minister in our time. He might, I believe, add the industry and affections of millions to the wealth and strength of this great empire. But if he should fail—if he should prove himself to be the agent of a timid and selfish oligarchy, rather than the Prime Minister of the Crown and of the people—if he shall not dare to do these things which in my conscience I believe he knows to be necessary,—even then we will not despair; for, as I said, there is growing up in England, and I hope in Ireland, a party so strong and numerous, that by and by it will leave out only the pauperism at one end of the scale, and, it may be, the titled and the privileged at the other; it will include almost the whole people; it will urge upon Government—united as we shall be with the people of Ireland—these great questions which I have discussed to-night. If the aristocracy of the United Kingdom has heaped evils unnumbered upon Ireland, why, I ask, should not the intelligent and virtuous people of the United Kingdom make them an ample restitution? And when I speak to that great party throughout this country, I would say that in all their struggles, whatsoever they may undertake, whatsoever they may accomplish, they cannot do a nobler or a better thing than to consecrate the cause of their advancing liberties by glorious and fruitful labour for the regeneration of Ireland.’

One more deliverance on Irish questions at this juncture must be noticed. On the 25th of October 1852, Mr. Bright addressed an important letter to Dr. Gray—afterwards Sir John Gray, M.P.—proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal*. As Mr. Thorold Rogers has observed, the estimate of the property of the Irish Church given in this letter was too low, but it does not affect the argument, or the principle of the proposed arrangement. The document was penned in view of a conference which the friends of religious equality in Ireland were about to hold in Dublin, with the object of considering the existing ecclesiastical arrangements of the country. Taking the keenest interest in this question, and being unable to be present at the deliberations of the Conference—if, indeed, the invitations had extended beyond Irishmen and Irish representatives—Mr. Bright had adopted this course to make his opinions known.



He began by observing that the case of the Catholic population of Ireland was so strong, so unanswerable, and so generally admitted, that nothing was wanting to ensure its complete success but the combination of a few able and honest men to concentrate and direct existing opinion. If such men could be found—resolute, persevering, and disinterested—a great work was before them; they would meet with insult and calumny in abundance; but having a right cause, and working it with right means, they would certainly succeed. Mr. Bright went on to assume that perfect religious equality would be demanded; in fact, on this point there should be no possibility of mistake; the demand for equality must be unequivocal, and it was most desirable that some mode of attaining it should be distinctly pointed out. Lord John Russell and Lord Grey, seeing the enormous evil of the existing system, were ready to justify almost any measure that promised political and ecclesiastical equality to the Irish Catholics; but they wished that equality to be obtained without the subversion of the Protestant Established Church in Ireland. But to have two Established Churches in Ireland, the one Protestant and the other Catholic; to have in the House of Lords Protestant and Catholic bishops, elbowing each other on the ‘right reverend bench,’ guarding ‘the temporal and spiritual interests of two Churches which denounce each other as idolatrous or heretical, would be an inconsistency so glaring that it would go far to overthrow all reverence for Governments or Churches, if not for Christianity itself. The scheme is surely too absurd to be seriously thought of; and if there be a statesman bold enough to propose it, he will find no support in the opinion of the English public, except from that small section with whom religion goes for nothing, and Churches and priests are tolerated as machinery in the pay and service of the Government.’

There was one equality, however, that would be received with general favour, and that was one starting from the point that henceforth there must be no Church in Ireland in connection with the State. But there would still arise with this the question of the appropriation of the large funds then in the hands of the Irish Established Church. Mr. Bright next detailed his own scheme for

the appropriation of these funds. He proposed the establishment of a Church Property Commission, authorised to appropriate the £10,000,000 of Church property in certain proportions among the Established, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic Churches. In dividing the sum he would appropriate so much of it to the Roman Catholics as would provide a small piece of land in every parish—say from ten to twenty acres—in the possession of the Catholic Church, to be made over absolutely and for ever to the Catholics of Ireland. Under an arrangement of this kind, of course the special grant to the College of Maynooth would be withdrawn. In their turn, the Presbyterians would resign the *Regium Donum*, and receive instead such a portion of the general fund, absolutely and for ever, as would produce a revenue equal to the Parliamentary grant. Similarly he would treat the Protestant Episcopalians; giving them absolutely a sum about equal to that bestowed on the others, together with the privilege of possessing their churches at a nominal rent, so long as there should be a congregation. Thus he would have exhausted three out of the ten millions to be allotted. The remaining five or seven millions, as the case might be, could, and in his opinion should, be reserved for purposes strictly Irish, and directed to the educational and moral improvement of the people, without respect to class or creed.

Meeting a possible objection that his suggestions were contrary to his own well-known views on the subject of religious equality, Mr. Bright said—

‘From Scotland, and probably from certain quarters in England, we may hear of the great crime of handing over £1,000,000 sterling to the Roman Catholics of Ireland. It will, perhaps, be insisted upon, that to add to the means of a Church whose teaching is held to be “erroneous” is a grievous national sin; and many will honestly doubt the wisdom of a scheme which proposes such an appropriation of a portion of a great public fund. Now, there is not a man in the United Kingdom more averse to religious endowments by the State than I am. I object to the compulsory levying of a tax from any man to teach any religion, and still more to teach a religion in which he does not believe; and I am of opinion that to take a Church into the pay of the State, and to place it under the control of the State, is to deaden and corrupt the Church, and to enlist its influence on the side of all that is evil in the civil government. But in the plan now suggested the Irish sects or Churches would be left entirely free, as is the Free Church in Scotland, or the Wesleyan Methodist Church in England.

The grants once made, each Church would possess absolutely its own funds, just as much as if they were the accumulations of the voluntary contributions and liberality of past generations of its members, and thus would be avoided the damage to religion, and to civil government which is inseparable from what is called the union of Church and State; whilst the sum granted to each Church, being equal to a provision of about £40,000 per annum, would be too small to create any important corporate influence adverse to the public interest.'

The writer looked for objections to his scheme. The grievance was centuries old, and around it were entwined interests, prejudices, fanaticism, animosities, and convictions. It was a desperate evil, and whoever waited till the remedy was pleasant to everybody would wait for ever. The object in view was the tranquillity of Ireland, and the means were simple. Being neither Roman Catholic, Protestant Episcopalian, nor Presbyterian, nor an Irishman, his own interest in the matter was not local or sectarian. He had endeavoured to study it, and to regard it as became an Englishman loving justice and freedom, anxious for the tranquillity of Ireland, the welfare of the empire, and the honour of the imperial Government.

'Some experience and much reflection,' Mr. Bright added, 'have convinced me that all efforts on behalf of industry and peace in Ireland will be in great part unavailing until we eradicate the sentiment which is universal among her Catholic population—that the Imperial Government is partial, and that to belong to the Roman Catholic Church is to incur the suspicion or the hostility of the law. A true "equality" established among the Irish sects would put an end to this pernicious but all-pervading sentiment; and Catholics, whether priests or laymen, would feel that the last link of their fetters was at length broken. Supremacy on the one hand, and a degrading inferiority on the other, would be abolished, and the whole atmosphere of Irish social and political life would be purified. Then, too, Christianity would appeal to the population, not as a persecuting or a persecuted faith, with her features disfigured by the violence of political conflict, but radiant with the divine beauty which belongs to her, and speaking with irresistible force to the hearts and consciences of men. I know not if the statesman be among us who is destined to settle this great question; but whoever







*James G. Thompson*

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE EARL OF DERRY.

Thomas C. Jack London & Edinburgh



he may be, he will strengthen the monarchy, earn the gratitude of three kingdoms, and build up for himself a lasting renown.'

The position assumed in Mr. Bright's letter, that the Irish Church was an anomaly and an iniquity, was not denied, or at least only by interested bodies. As was said at the time, the Church was in the position of the *Rois Fainéants* of the Merovingian race in France, who were universally recognised as an evil, but who maintained their position simply because, before an experiment was made, no one could calculate the consequences of getting rid of them. The difficulty was a practical one, and one of great magnitude. Nevertheless, the statesman was living who actually brought the Irish Church question to an issue and a settlement some years later, though not, as regards details, on the lines indicated by Mr. Bright. But perfect religious equality was achieved, and Mr. Bright could little have anticipated that he would be a member of the Government which, under Mr. Gladstone's guidance, accomplished the task.



## CHAPTER X.

*GENERAL LEGISLATION—1846–53.*

Mr. Bright on Questions of General Legislation.—Factory Labour.—Lord Ashley's Ten Hours' Bill.—Arguments of Mr. Bright and his Friends.—The Factory Acts of 1847 and 1850.—Flogging in the Army.—Lord John Russell's Education Scheme of 1847.—It is opposed by Mr. Bright.—His Speeches on the Cultivation of Cotton in India.—Excessive Public Expenditure.—Mr. Cobden's Motion thereon.—The Hastings-Cobden Correspondence.—Mr. Bright attacks the Derby Government of 1852.—Further Speeches on Free Trade and Protection.—Capital Punishment.—Evidence on the Game Laws.—Bill for their Repeal introduced.—The Burdens on Land.—Mr. Disraeli's Proposal to relieve the Landowners.—It is opposed by Mr. Bright, and defeated.—Second Resolution on Agricultural Distress.—It is lost by a narrow majority.—Mr. Hume's Bill to Amend the National Representation.—Supported by Mr. Bright.—The County Franchise.—Lord John Russell's Reform Bill of 1852.—The Ballot.—Mr. Bright on Church Rates.—Taxes on Knowledge and the Freedom of the Press.—Speeches of Mr. Bright and Mr. Cobden.—Government Defeat on the Advertisement Duty.—Mr. Bright on Parliamentary Oaths.—The case of Alderman Salomons.—Papal Aggression.—Mr. Bright eloquently opposes the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill.—Public Addresses at Manchester and other places.—Mr. Bright invited to stand for Rochdale.—The Kossuth Reception at Manchester.—Defence of 'the Manchester Party.'—Mr. Bright at Belfast.—The Manchester Election of 1852.—Mr. Bright on the War Panic of 1853.



**U**RING the earlier years of his Parliamentary career—that is, when he was in the prime of his physical strength—the member for Manchester furnished abundant evidence of the deep interest he took in all great public questions. As one proof of this, we find that in the period above-named, the eight years extending from 1846 to 1853 inclusive, he addressed the House on no fewer than forty-four occasions, all in connection with subjects of moment. Most of these speeches were of considerable length,

and many of them were of representative importance. And in these addresses we take here no note of the many Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary speeches Mr. Bright delivered in the course of the year 1846 on the Free Trade question.

The session of 1846 had scarcely opened when the subject of factory labour was again brought before the House of Commons. The large party in favour of a reduction in the hours of labour included very heterogeneous elements. Those like Lord Ashley, who least understood the question from its practical point of view, but were yet the most numerous body in favour of reduction, were perhaps the most sincere in their advocacy. There were some, too, like John Fielden and Richard Oastler, who were also sincere, but few in numbers; while there were others who regarded factory legislation as a kind of retaliation upon the manufacturers for the powerful part they had played in the Free Trade campaign. Mr. Cobden, Mr. Bright, Mr. Joseph Hume, and those who thought with them, opposed compulsory measures in connection with the hours of labour from the standpoint of free trade. The workman had the utmost right of freedom in this respect, and they claimed that any alteration of the hours of labour ought to be left for settlement as between employer and employed. The Protectionists, of course, threw in their influence with those who were in favour of compulsory legislation, and against the Free-traders; and there were many Radicals who, on grounds of supposed humanitarianism, followed the same course.

On the 29th of January 1846, Lord Ashley brought in his bill for limiting the hours of labour of young persons in factories to ten hours. Sir James Graham, the Home Secretary, did not oppose the introduction of the bill, although he intimated that no decision with respect to the Corn Laws could ever alter his opinion with regard to the propriety of interfering with adult labour in the manufacturing districts. Mr. Hume contended that industry and capital ought to be free, and the real effect of Lord Ashley's measure would be to throw large numbers of men out of employment, for their labour was dependent upon that of the children. Mr. Bright said they were all anxious that the labouring population should work less, and have

better wages ; but the noble lord looked at one side of the question, and attributed evils to the working of mills which in reality arose from the circumstance of large towns and the labourers being left by their more powerful neighbours in a state of very great neglect. These evils were now diminishing, and there was a unanimous endeavour to improve as far as possible the condition of factory workers. He did not believe that a majority of the working classes were in favour of the proposed measure ; but he believed that a large number were in favour of it, and he was extremely sorry to give his vote or to speak in opposition to the wishes of a number of honest men. He did not oppose a reduction in the hours of labour, which he believed would come with greater prosperity, and a feeling of harmony between masters and workmen, but he did oppose this compulsory bill.

The favourite argument of the promoters of the Ten Hours' Bill, that as much could be earned in ten hours as in twelve, was strongly combated by Mr. Bright in the debate on the second reading. But even if it were so, the loss of two hours' pay would be a more serious injury than the saving of two hours' work. In the cotton districts, people were generally paid by the piece, and how then could such legislation affect them favourably, so far as wages were concerned ? The speed of machinery could not be increased so as to make up the difference in time lost. He reiterated his conviction that when the Free-trade measures of the Government were carried out, and the manufacturers became actuated, as they would be, by feelings more and more kindly towards their workpeople, all that they could hope to achieve by the bill would be attained by voluntary arrangement, and without the mischief that invariably attended the interference of the Legislature in such questions.

Lord Ashley's bill was lost by a majority of ten ; and those who have charged Mr. Bright with opposing this legislation from interested motives may be reminded that there also voted against Lord Ashley the following distinguished members, many of whom were well entitled to be considered the friends of the working classes : Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. Bouverie, Dr. Bowring, Mr. Cobden, Sir A. Cockburn, Mr. J. Evelyn Denison, Mr. Goulburn, Sir J. Graham,

Mr. Sidney Herbert, Mr. H. Labouchere, Mr. Fox Maule, Lord Morpeth, Sir Robert Peel, Mr. Ricardo, Sir F. Thesiger (Lord Chelmsford), and Mr. Walpole.

This measure for limiting the hours of labour in factories was reintroduced in the following session. During the debate on the second reading, Mr. Bright entered still more fully into the question, his speech being to some extent necessitated by the frequent allusions made to him. He said that he had lived all his life amid the population for whom they were called upon to legislate; that he had been largely, and was now very largely, connected with this particular trade; and that he had not a farthing in the world that was not invested in it. He had therefore a right to speak of the feelings and wishes of the working classes in Lancashire. But let it not be supposed for a moment—for he would deny it altogether—that in his opposition to this Ten Hours' Bill he was influenced by a belief that it would in any degree, if passed, injure his property or his personal prospects. If this measure were calculated to advance the interests of the twelve hundred thousand persons who were more or less interested in the cotton trade, then his interests must be consulted in that which would advance the interests of by far the largest proportion of those who were in any way connected with those trades. The accusation of inhumanity he repelled, and reminded the House that already no child under thirteen was allowed to work more than six hours a day. The real object of the promoters of the measure was not to take care of children under eighteen, and women of all ages, but to interfere by law with the labour of all persons, of whatever age and whatever sex they might be, who were engaged in the manufactures of this country, and to give to all these classes that measure of legislative protection—he used the word protection in the sense in which it had been used by all who were in favour of monopolies—a protection that would diminish the hours of labour; while it would continue a rate of wages which, from the days of Sadler till the present time, was clearly a rate higher than labour in a free market could command.

Mr. Bright adduced evidence to prove the incorrectness of the statements respecting the unhealthiness of factory life. In the

following passage he gave some interesting personal reminiscences, and then demonstrated the morality of the factory operative: —

‘The hon. member for Dorsetshire (Mr. Bankes) spoke of the impossibility of persons obtaining education under the system of twelve hours’ labour. The hon. member should understand that he (Mr. Bright) was not defending the principle that these persons should work for twelve hours a day. He was merely meeting the argument which had been advanced in favour of the bill. Did the hon. member for Dorsetshire forget that those children did not work more than six hours a day until they were thirteen years old? For himself, he could say that he had never been at school after he was fifteen years of age. It was true there were, no doubt, many things which hon. members knew or learned by remaining at college until they were twenty or twenty-one, of which he was ignorant; but still, he considered his own case to be in some degree a proof that a man might get some education by remaining at school only until he was fifteen, and that he might do something by remaining there even if he was thirteen. But what could be more ludicrous than to say that a person could get no education under thirteen? The old system was to bind apprentices at the age of fourteen; but he would maintain that the degree of education among factory labourers was not inferior to that to be found among all the other classes of this country. He had no doubt whatever but that their consumption of books, their purchase of newspapers, and their general devotion to literature, which the present age afforded so many opportunities of encouraging, was as pure and as extensive at least as that of any other class of the labouring population of Great Britain. If the hon. gentleman the member for Dorsetshire was not yet convinced on this point, he would beg to bring before him the evidence of the Rev. Mr. Clay, who had compiled a list of the extent of criminality existing in various classes in Lancashire. He began with No. 1, and went up to No. 20, the first number showing the class among which crime was highest, and the last the class in which there was the smallest number of criminals. Now, No. 19 in that list was the class of domestic servants, and No. 20 was that of the female operatives in factories, while No. 1 was the class of grooms and coachkeepers, persons who were much more extensively employed by members of that House than by cotton-spinners. Now, if the factory labourers were not the sober and orderly class of persons of which the noble lord (Lord John Manners) had spoken, he believed Mr. Clay would not have produced evidence like this. He believed there was not a magistrate in the manufacturing districts who would not bear testimony to the good conduct of these persons, and to the fact that their good behaviour even exceeded that of other classes in the same counties.’

Mr. Bright then dealt with the question of wages, and also with the decrease in the consumption of raw material in connection with the various manufactures of the country, which must take place if this bill passed. He produced statistics bearing upon these questions; and he maintained that Parliament had no business to interfere with the workman’s right to labour. To show that capitalists were

not unmindful of the interests of their workpeople, he mentioned that in the factory with which he was himself connected they had a large infant school, together with a reading-room and news-room, and a school for adults, where the workmen attended after working hours. Not a few hundred pounds per annum were expended in promoting in this manner the interests of the workmen; and that, too, wholly independent of any act of the Legislature. This was the case at many other manufactories; and he warned the House that by arming the workmen against the capitalists, as in the proposed legislation, it would be impossible that a friendly mutual feeling could continue. He blamed the Government for leaving this subject an open one, and not making it a Cabinet question.

The fates were against Mr. Bright, however, for before the close of the session the bill passed both Houses and became law. It was due to the subject of our biography that his position on a much-debated question should be stated with some fulness, and in his own language. His arguments were certainly endorsed by the best political economists of the day, as well as by a large section of the intelligent men of both political parties. It is further due to Mr. Bright to state that in 1855, when Mr. Cobbett unsuccessfully attempted to reopen the question of factory labour, and to legislate upon it, Mr. Bright, in opposing the hon. member, said that although he had been a strong opponent of the existing law, he would not be the man to move or second any motion having for its object to disturb the duration of labour fixed upon by the bill of 1850. The Legislature had decided the question, and there he would leave it. The bill of 1850 was introduced and passed to give effect to the provisions of the Act of 1847.

So early as 1846 Mr. Bright was one of a small minority who were in favour of the abolition of flogging in the army. When Dr. Bowring divided the House on the question, and delivered an able speech in behalf of his motion, he was supported by Mr. Bright. The latter referred to the treatment to which soldiers were subjected by their officers—treatment such as flesh and blood could not stand. He also explained the reasons why the calling of a common soldier was regarded as a degrading one. In the manufacturing districts,

when a man had run through every kind of vice he became a soldier, and it was mentioned as a culminating fact in his career that such an one had enlisted. The reason why they would never get any but the lowest of the people was that there was not a warlike spirit in England. There was a commercial spirit in England, and the people found the means of a more profitable and honourable existence in the walks of trade and commerce than in the gaudy trappings offered them in the service of the State. It was not to be expected that when a man could live comfortably in his own cottage, earning in an honourable way a subsistence for himself and his family, that he would become a soldier. He should rejoice to see the warlike spirit die away, and less occasion for armaments, and forces, and military displays, not to speak of those horrors by which the people of England had of late been excited.

But only thirty-seven members voted for the abolition of flogging, and the motion was lost by a majority of fifty-three.

When the Government scheme of education was unfolded by Lord John Russell in 1847, it was scarcely to be expected, seeing how distasteful were its provisions to the Nonconformists, that Mr. Bright could remain silent. Ministers proposed to act upon certain minutes of the Education Committee of the Privy Council by issuing grants of public money for the purposes specified. Roman Catholic schools were excluded from the grants. Other points of the Government plan will be apparent from the hon. member's reply.

Mr. Bright first strongly condemned the minutes, and then proceeded to reply to Mr. Macaulay's argument that the State was bound to educate the people. He utterly denied the truth of this position, remarking that it was strange that neither in past centuries nor in modern times had any statesman acted on such a principle. If it were a solemn duty to see that all the people were educated, then Government were obliged to enforce education. The object, tendency, and result of the present scheme was to give increased and enormous power to the clergy of the Established Church—so had every step taken by the Government since 1839. The speaker then went on to show what had been done in the last few years by the voluntary system in England, Scotland, and Wales. Producing

statistics in each case, he showed, particularly as regarded the last-named division of the empire, that where the Church had educated one child, the Dissenting Churches had educated from eight to ten. 'It is not because the Church of England receives money from this grant that Nonconformists object to the grant ; but it is because Nonconformists themselves, in accordance with the principles by which they are so, cannot receive public money for the teaching of religion in their schools ; and, therefore, they object to the State giving money as an advantage to the Church schools—an advantage by which they must profit, and which will certainly be most damaging to the Dissenting schools.'

Mr. Macaulay had charged the Nonconformists with abandoning the principles they once held dear ; and he cited the example of the United States in the matter of education. Mr. Bright denied that a parallel existed. 'Give us, if you please, the state of things which exist in the United States, and particularly in the State of Massachusetts. Free us from the trammels of your Church—set religion apart from the interference of the State—if you will make public provision for education, let it not depend upon the doctrines of a particular creed—and then you will find the various sects in this country will be as harmonious on the question of education as are the people of the United States of America.' Nonconformists objected to any portion of the public money going to teachers of religion belonging either to the Established Church or to Dissenting bodies ; they would not receive it themselves. Any Nonconformist who took one sixpence of this grant for the purpose of teaching the tenets of his particular sect could never afterwards, with any show of consistency and good faith, say one syllable against the domination and usurpation of the Established Church.

The Government had entered into overtures with the Wesleyans, who believed that the Roman Catholics were to be excluded from the grant ; but if they were, he was reminded of the expression of a well-known writer :

'Ofttimes, the pleasure is as great  
Of being cheated as to cheat.'



A proposition to open these grants to all persons of all religious persuasions whatsoever, he could have understood ; but he was sorry that it had come to this. Apologising if he had spoken with warmth, Mr. Bright added : ' Let it be remembered that I am avowedly a member of a Nonconformist body. My forefathers languished in prison by the acts of that Church which you now ask me to aggrandise. Within two years places of worship of that body to which I belong have been despoiled of their furniture to pay the salary of a minister of the Established Church ; and when I look back and see how that Church has been uniformly hostile to the progress of public liberty, it is impossible for me to refrain from protesting against the outrages committed by the Government on the Nonconformist body for the sake of increasing the aggrandisements of a political institution, with which, as I hope and believe, the time is not far off when this country will dispense.'

The Government grant was eventually agreed to.

Reserving for later treatment, and in their proper order, Mr. Bright's more lengthy and comprehensive speeches on India, there are indications, in the sessions with which we are now dealing, that his attention was already closely directed to questions affecting our Indian possessions and their relations to this country. Thus, in May 1847, he moved for a select committee to inquire into the progress of the cultivation of cotton in India. In doing so, he said that what potatoes were to Ireland, cotton was to Lancashire ; and that as in Ireland there had been a calamity unparalleled in consequence of the failure of the staple food of the people, so, if we could conceive the raw material of the cotton manufacture greatly to fail, we should see calamities overspread that county equal to, if not exceeding, that which had overtaken the population of Ireland. The Lancashire cotton famine, many years subsequently, verified to the letter these prophetic words. Mr. Bright brought forward figures upon the growth of cotton in various parts of the world. The East India Company, he said, had failed in promoting the cultivation of cotton, and he wanted a committee to ascertain why they had failed. His language was equally significant and far-seeing as regarded America. Reminding the House that the whole of the cotton grown in America

was produced by slave labour, he affirmed that slavery would ultimately be abolished either by peaceable or by violent means; and an interruption to the production of cotton would be a calamity severely felt through the manufacturing districts of England.

Members being engaged in some occupation more pleasant to them than the discussion of this really momentous question, and the Government and the India Company being opposed to it, the House was counted out during the debate that ensued on Mr. Bright's motion. In the year 1848, however, Mr. Bright obtained and presided over a committee to inquire into the obstacles which existed to the cultivation and growth of cotton in India. Subsequently, and as the result of this committee, on the 18th of June 1850, the hon. member moved for a commission to proceed to India and investigate on the spot this question of the growth of cotton. It must appear, he said, of the first importance that the supply of raw material upon which an immense amount of capital was engaged, and upon the working up of which some two millions of the population obtained a livelihood, should not fail. It was a question not of local but of national importance. By statistics he showed how enormously the cotton industry in this country had grown, and repeated his previous arguments. Reviewing the history of the growth of cotton in India, he quoted authorities to prove that there was nothing in the character or social condition of the Indian people which would make it unreasonable in us to expect large supplies of cotton, the produce of their industry. But grievances required to be redressed, and measures adopted to further the prosperity of India. The population of India was helpless unless Parliament came forward to its relief.

Sir J. C. Hobhouse opposed the motion, alleging that all governors and other Indian officials were doing their duty in regard to the matters indicated, and that Lord Dalhousie would make good use of the continuance of peace to further the interests of India. The motion was negatived, Mr. Bright predicting that at no very distant period Parliament and the Government would be compelled to take up this question in a much more serious manner than they then seemed disposed to do. Three years later—that is, in 1853

—He again drew attention to this matter, recapitulating his previous efforts in connection with it. After all that had been done in regard to India, the whole case of the condition of the native population was left untouched. It was essential, in order to form a fair judgment, that unbiassed and impartial witnesses should be examined before the committee then sitting. Having alluded to native petitions for inquiry, and the great urgency of the matter, he asked the Government whether their proposed measure for the future government of India was a temporary or permanent one; and if the former, for how many years it was intended to renew the present government. Lord John Russell made the stereotyped official reply, that the Government were considering their plans, and could not reveal them at that moment.

This question excited great interest out of the House, especially in Lancashire, whose interests were naturally bound up in the supply of cotton. On the 18th of January 1850, a meeting of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce was held, for the purpose of considering whether any course was open whereby enlarged commercial intercourse with India could be promoted, and especially whether an increased supply of cotton could be obtained. Mr. Bright spoke at some length, adducing indisputable evidence that there were abundant means in India, as regarded climate and soil and population, for the production of a large supply of cotton in that country. It was because there were some obstacles in the way, which were removable, that India did not supply England with cotton. Notwithstanding a memorial to the Prime Minister, and a petition to the House of Commons from the Manchester Chamber, the Government, as we have seen, declined to appoint a commission. On another occasion Mr. Bright said that the industry of Lancashire could never be secure while it was dependent upon one market for a supply of cotton. By steam navigation and other modes of transit they were brought within some thirty-six days of India, a country that used to be some six months' distance from Great Britain. Government had refused an inquiry, and the Manchester Chamber of Commerce were wisely sending out Mr. Mackay upon their own responsibility. This gentleman died before his work was completed,

but his report showed that with regard to the district of Guzerat, from which the main portion of cotton comes, all that had been said with regard to the influence and neglect of the Government in regard to the cultivation of cotton in India was perfectly true. Commenting upon this, Mr. Bright remarked that until some emergency came which alarmed the whole Indian administration and involved the Government in the dangers which were ahead, he was not certain that they would get any attention paid to the question in Parliament.

In this matter, again, the hon. member's words were justified by the event.

Mr. Bright has repeatedly inveighed against an excessive public expenditure. Speaking on the Budget of 1848, and referring to the depressed condition of the country, he said, surely that was not the time when the military expenditure of the country should be increased for the purpose of meeting an imaginary enemy; and the proposed increase of taxes for such a purpose was as unjustifiable as it was oppressive. He warned the Government that it had come in by accident, and might be destroyed by blunders. The noble lord (Russell) and his colleagues reminded him of the religious order of La Trappe, who were said to have employed themselves diligently in digging their own graves. If the Government supposed they could do in 1848, with respect to foreign affairs and warlike armaments, what was done thirty or forty years ago, they committed the most egregious blunder that statesmen were ever guilty of. A few days later, in a debate on the public expenditure, he protested against the constantly increasing military estimates. The House was aware that some years ago the Russians were expected in the Thames; and very soon afterwards there was an increase in the military expenses. After that, a French Prince wrote a very foolish pamphlet; and another increase followed that. The recent panic in the public mind had arisen from the fear that the taxation of the country was to be unnecessarily increased, at a time when the sufferings of the country were extraordinarily great. Again, on the 31st of March, when Mr. Hume proposed to reduce the number of the land forces from 113,847 to 100,000 men, Mr Bright said the

House might rest assured that sixty millions of taxation was an amount which could not be levied for any length of time from the people of this country without creating a deep and general feeling of dissatisfaction. To economy and retrenchment the Government would have at length to come. Nothing was done for Ireland, save that they were asked to vote millions of money to maintain a standing army there. Yet in Ireland last year more of their fellow-subjects had died of positive starvation—yes, literally perished of famine and pestilence in their hovels, in the workhouses, or by the side of the highroads—than England had lost of her people in any war, ancient or modern, in which she had ever been engaged.

This question of public expenditure Mr. Bright again dealt with in February 1849, when his friend Mr. Cobden brought forward a proposal for reducing the public disbursements by ten millions. There was a considerable feeling in the country that something should be done in this direction, and in consequence Associations for promoting the cause of Financial Reform had sprung up in London, Edinburgh, Liverpool, and other large towns. A severe attack upon Mr. Cobden was made by Mr. Herries, the member for Stamford. In commencing his speech, Mr. Bright defended Mr. Cobden, and drew a striking contrast between the representation of the West Riding and of Manchester and that of Stamford, a small borough which was so much under the influence of a certain noble lord that a considerable portion of its inhabitants had prayed to be disfranchised. Coming to the general question, Mr. Bright referred to the contrast presented between the financial condition of England and America; the latter, notwithstanding the increase of its population and seaboard, increased neither its army nor its navy. England maintained more troops in Canada than the whole standing army of the United States. The Chancellor of the Exchequer well knew that this was entirely a question of pressure; the Government had considered how little reduction would suffice to take off the edge of agitation. The hon. member then smartly attacked the Protectionists, informing them that the farmers would soon discover the virtue of retrenchment, when they found it was the only source of a remission of taxation; and he called upon them to join the

manufacturers in compelling the Government to make reductions. 'You vote millions here,' said Mr. Bright, 'as if they were nothing, or as if every country was a California, and that gold was not produced in this country by the sweat of millions of men, who are entitled to as just and merciful a consideration of their interests as the highest and wealthiest man in Parliament.' The reformers, of course, were in a minority, Mr. Cobden's motion being defeated by 275 to 78.

A curious correspondence took place between Mr. Cobden and Sir Thomas Hastings, of the Royal Navy, in December 1850. This correspondence arose out of a reference which Mr. Bright made at the Peace Congress at Birmingham, in the previous month, to the evidence given by Sir Thomas before a Parliamentary Committee on Navy Estimates. Referring to the superstitious fear of a war with France, Mr. Bright observed that the only authority upon which a British admiral anticipated war was an idle story told by the Bishop of Madagascar. Appealed to for his authority, Mr. Bright gave Mr. Cobden, who was a member of the committee in question. Sir Thomas Hastings thereupon sent Mr. Cobden a challenge to a duel. The latter responded in a letter full of humour. 'If in my earlier days,' he wrote, 'my admiration for the genius of Sheridan had not tempted me to witness the mimic exploits of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, I might have been at a loss to comprehend the meaning of your letter. Aided, however, by my recollections of that model duellist, I understand you to propose that we should lay down our pens, and have a personal interview, not to talk over the matter in dispute, not even to approach within speaking distance, but to take our stand at twelve paces apart, with pistols in hand, and endeavour to blow out each other's brains. Now, I am satisfied, without any such experiment on my head at least, that half an ounce of lead propelled by less than a quarter of an ounce of powder is quite sufficient to shatter the human skull to atoms, and extinguish in a moment all powers of reason, all sense of justice, and every religious sentiment. But how such a process could satisfy me that I had acted unjustly towards you, or convince you of the contrary, is, I confess, quite beyond my comprehension. So soon as I had

recovered from the fit of laughter into which, I must own, your challenge threw me, and after I had mastered the temptation I felt to name for my second my much-esteemed friend Mr. Punch, I endeavoured to procure a copy of the report of the committee ; and, having refreshed my memory by a perusal of your evidence, I will endeavour to state the facts of the case as between you and myself in such a way as shall admit of no further misapprehension.'

Mr. Cobden then proceeded to show that Mr. Bright was substantially accurate, the only matter needing correction being the substitution of the French Bishop of Japan for the Bishop of Madagascar. Mr. Bright had informed Sir Thomas Hastings that there were verbal inaccuracies in the report of his speech, and no doubt the whole thing could have been satisfactorily explained had a further opportunity been afforded Mr. Bright. 'You must, like all public men,' said Mr. Cobden in conclusion, 'expect that your conduct will be freely canvassed ; and your fate will be a luckier one than that of most of us if you do not find yourself often misapprehended, and sometimes misrepresented. If, unable to restrain the ebullitions of an irascible temper, you must needs challenge a member of the Legislature to mortal combat, merely because another member is reported to have made a mistake in a single word in a speech of an hour's length, or because a reporter's pen may have slipped at a critical moment, then you have mistaken your vocation ; and you would be consulting your own reputation, and the interest of the country, by retiring from the public service, and seeking security for your susceptible nerves within the inviolable precincts of your own domestic circle.' With this letter the correspondence ended, Sir Thomas Hastings discreetly refraining from pushing the matter further.

When the Derby Government came into office in March 1852, and delayed appealing to the country, Mr. Bright severely blamed them for not dissolving Parliament, and for attempting to conduct public business as the representatives of a minority. This forcible and vigorous speech was delivered during a debate on the Army Estimates. Alluding to the probable Protectionist policy of the Government, he said, 'Either you should recant your Protectionist

principles, or you should go to the constituencies, and let them decide the question, once for all. The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Disraeli), and the noble lord the First Minister (Lord Derby), have referred to the humble labours which you, as a Government, are willing to undertake. We have no objection to the humility of your tasks—we think there has been a sufficient humiliation in your labours while in opposition. But there is one humility I do hope you will not stoop to, and that is, the retaining office not only when you cannot carry your principles, but when you dare not even avow them.'

Mr. Bright was unusually incisive in this speech, every word of which told upon his opponents on the Treasury Bench. He showed that the representation of the country was in a bad state when a few little pocket boroughs could return the Tory Ministers. The President of the India Board (Mr. Herries) had really only one constituent at Stamford, viz., the Marquis of Exeter. The Colonial Secretary (Sir J. Pakington) had the good fortune to return himself; and, as might be expected, he lived in a state of unparalleled harmony with his constituency. He (Mr. Bright) warned hon. gentlemen opposite that if they attempted to carry out Protection they would see a tumult in this country compared with which that of 1832 was as a whisper to a whirlwind. 'If you are for Protection, and will not say so, then I tell you we will make war upon you. You said once you would break up an "organised hypocrisy." I say to you, we will try if we cannot break up a confederated imposture. And bad as the representation of this country is—and no one is more conscious of the faults of our representative system than I am—yet I am perfectly persuaded that if you will dissolve Parliament and go to the constituencies for any duty you like to name, large or small, upon corn, you will find that your ephemeral Government will be scattered to the winds; and that the united voices of the intelligent and free people of this country will condemn the policy you avowed in opposition, and upon the promise of which, to your deluded dupes, you have scrambled to your seats of power.' This language of powerful invective raised opposing shouts, the speaker being loudly applauded from the Liberal benches.



In the course of the debate on Ways and Means on the 20th of July, 1849, the question of Free Trade was raised and discussed. Mr. Bright emphatically stated that he was confirmed in his belief in the truth of the principles of Free Trade. It would be a consolation to him, as long as he lived, that he had been, in the smallest degree, instrumental in causing the adoption of those principles by the people and the Government of this country ; and now, whatever poverty existed in the country, he never passed a man, woman, or child, however poor, however wan, however suffering, but he felt a consolation that his voice had been raised against a system which had made them more poor, more wan, and more suffering ; and he believed that, as the seasons passed over us, we should find there would be, on both sides of the House, and in every portion of the country, not only a general acquiescence in the principles of Free Trade, but a clinging to them so firmly that no political party would ever be able to change the policy which the House had so wisely adopted in 1846.

Directly or indirectly, the question of Free Trade came up in all the sessions with which we are at present concerned. For example, in 1848 the Government were desirous of giving a slight protection to the West India colonies in the matter of sugar, which was not sufficient for the Protectionists, and too much for the Free-traders. Mr. Bright accordingly moved an amendment that it was not expedient to make any alteration in the Sugar Duties Act of 1846. If the present bill were carried, the West Indians would come to Parliament again and again, and that very proposition would be their justification for every future demand. The people of the colonies wished to reserve to themselves the opportunity of imitating Mr. Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, who was said to have been always asking for more. There could be no doubt that to encourage the greatest possible consumption was the most likely means of delivering the colonists from their present embarrassed condition. The principle of Free Trade was agreed to in 1846 with regard to corn, sugar, and a great many articles of English manufacture ; it was acted upon in accordance with the opinion of the vast majority of the British nation. Whether sound or not, at any rate let the

principle have that trial which even its opponents said, being carried, it was right that it should have. The Government, however, prevailed, the amendment being negatived.

After the elections of 1852, the Conservative Government found that the result of their appeal to the country would not justify them in attempting to reverse the policy of Free Trade. When the House met in November, Mr. Villiers brought forward the question in a series of resolutions pledging the House definitely to a Free Trade policy. The debates which arose were very protracted. Mr. Bright, in following the Chancellor of the Exchequer, delivered a lengthy speech. He confuted the leading feature of Mr. Disraeli's defence, that the Protectionist party had not attempted to unsettle the legislation of 1846. In proof of this, he referred to Mr. Grantley Berkeley's motion in 1850, to Sir John Pakington's exertions against Free Trade, and to the efforts of Mr. Herries to restore the Navigation Laws. Mr. Disraeli had attempted to show that Lord John Russell was no better than himself in regard to commercial policy, but such recriminations would not be allowed to supersede the real question in debate. The Protectionist party had appealed to the country, and lost the verdict. Should that verdict be now drawn up by one who had repudiated Free Trade, or by one who had consistently supported it? One resolution declared that the legislation of Sir R. Peel was wise, just, and beneficial—it established a principle; the amendment merely announced a fact. Mr. Bright next proceeded to show that the Corn Laws were not passed in 1815 to enable the landlords to bear the burdens on land, and that the farmers had now lost nothing by Free Trade which the improved condition of the country had not amply compensated. But he distrusted the sincerity of the recent Ministerial professions; and to prove how large a party supporting Government entertained in July last strong opinions that Free Trade would be reversed, or some equivalent given in lieu of Protection, Mr. Bright cited extracts from the speeches delivered in different parts of the country by Protectionist members. The Marquis of Granby and other members had declared that they would ride the horse Protection as long as he was fit to go out with. The extracts read elicited

continuous cheers and laughter. Having fully proved this part of his case, Mr. Bright turned upon his opponents, remarking that their whole agitation for six years had been, the first part of the time calumny of Sir Robert Peel, and during the latter part demands for the Protection they had lost, or for some compensation in place of it. He asked the House now to sanction its own policy, to set its seal irrevocably on what it did in 1846, and by its vote to establish on a firm basis the charter of free industry to the people of this kingdom.

Ultimately, resolutions differing somewhat from those drawn up by Mr. Villiers, but still resolutions emphatically sanctioning and endorsing a Free-trade policy, were adopted by an immense majority.

The humane principles by which Mr. Bright has been actuated in questions affecting the public welfare received another exemplification in his attitude with regard to capital punishment. In three successive sessions this question came before the House of Commons. On the first occasion, in March 1848, Mr. Ewart moved for leave to bring in a bill totally repealing the punishment of death. He was defeated by 122 votes to 66. Mr. Bright, in supporting the motion, said the question was making great progress in the public mind. He was of opinion that this punishment of death did not convey the awful threats that many supposed it did to that condition of men by whom crimes of this grievous nature were committed. He then proceeded to show that the present law was uncertain, irregular, and unjust to a degree which could not be imputed to any other law upon the Statute-book. Mr. Bright having cited a number of startling cases in proof of this, asked if the House would tolerate the existence of any other branch of the law for an instant, if such irregularity could be charged against it? Let us have such a law as existed in France, by which extenuating circumstances were allowed to prevent capital punishments. The hon. member concluded by asking whether England would disgrace itself by being behind Tuscany, France to a large extent, Belgium, America in some of her States, and other countries, with regard to this question. He believed that by abolishing capital punishment,

and substituting a secondary punishment, we should find that crime, instead of increasing, as was dreaded, would be considerably diminished.

Mr. Ewart again brought forward his bill in the ensuing session, when his motion was lost by a majority of only 24. Mr. Bright again supported the proposition. He said it was unnecessary to go into what was called the Scripture argument, but he reminded members that for some centuries after the commencement of the Christian era, no person holding, or professing to hold, the Christian religion was known to interfere in capital punishments. In fact, up to the period of the fifth century, Christianity was understood to forbid its converts from being implicated in any degree whatever in the infliction of death upon criminals. Coming to the question of expediency, in all those countries where capital punishments were rarely or never inflicted, human life was just as safe as it was in Spain, or in England, or in Ireland. Moreover, past legislation afforded no proof of the advantages of capital punishment. The Legislature formerly found all its efforts ineffectual to repress the commonest offences by this punishment. The practice having failed in minor cases, how could it have an effect in putting down the crime of murder, which was almost always committed under circumstances which shut out from the contemplation of the criminal the consideration of that which must follow from the offence? The deterrent effect of the punishment had been greatly overrated, and Mr. Bright adduced cases in support of his contention. St. Augustine and others had borne special testimony to the fact that gladiatorial exhibitions and the execution of criminals had the effect of increasing crime. A punishment short of death would also relieve the authorities from the possibility of fearful mistakes. Men sometimes now escaped because juries, though feeling morally certain of their guilt, would not take the responsibility of sending them to the scaffold. These were the chief grounds upon which he advocated the abolition of the punishment of death. Mr. Ewart made a third attempt to introduce a bill, in the session of 1850, and on this occasion was defeated by six votes only. Mr. Bright was the chief speaker in this debate. Besides re-stating many of his

previous arguments with fresh force, he showed that for ninety years past Parliament had followed no guiding principle upon this question. He again applied himself to demonstrating that the punishment was far from being deterrent, and that its inequality was dangerous and fatal to an impartial administration of the law. 'If you wish to teach the people to reverence human life, you must first show them that you reverence it yourselves. An old English writer, Chaucer, says of his "Parson"—

"Christ's lore, and His Apostles twelve,  
He preached, but first he followed it himself;"

and if we would teach men to reverence and respect the lives of their fellow-men, the first and most powerful step we could take would be to abandon the halter and the scaffold, and to practise the doctrine we would inculcate upon the people.'

We have already seen that Mr. Bright secured a select committee to inquire into the operation of the Game Laws. Subsequently the hon. member and Mr. R. G. Welford published a work containing extracts from the evidence. Mr. Bright wrote an introduction, in which he demonstrated the evils of the laws from the farmer's and labourer's point of view. 'You plough and sow,' he remarked, 'and watch the growing crops with anxiety and hope; you rise early, and eat the bread of carefulness; rent-day comes twice a year with its inexorable demand; and yet you are doomed too frequently to see the fertility which Providence bestows, and your industry would secure, blighted and destroyed by creatures which would be deemed vermin but for the sanction which the law and your customs give to their preservation, and which exist for no advantage to you and for no good to the public, but solely to afford a few days' amusement in the year to the proprietor of the soil.' In the proposed draft report of the committee, Mr. Bright said, 'Game out of season is habitually provided at the clubs and dinners of the rich; the rural labourer is made the instrument by which these indulgences of the wealthy are obtained. Everything concurs to render the Game Laws the source of demoralisation, and to lead the labourers to those first breaches of the law which generally end in serious crime. The

destruction of agricultural produce, the prevention of high farming, and the consequent diminution of employment, form a national evil of extensive operation. These circumstances your committee believe to have an important and most mischievous influence on the morals of the people. Violence and bloodshed consequently occur from the preservation of game, of which numerous cases were referred to by the witnesses examined.' It appeared from a return published that in the year 1843 no fewer than 4529 convictions for offences against the Game Laws took place.

On the 23d of March 1848, Mr. Bright moved for leave to bring in a Bill for the Repeal of the Game Laws, but the House was very apathetic in the matter—as indeed it was for many years—and the hon. member's object was frustrated. His speech, however, on that occasion was a trenchant indictment of these laws, being supported by indisputable and startling facts as to their mischievous operation. He showed from the evidence of farmers the enormous losses consequent upon the existence of the laws, and said he was convinced that unless the cultivators of the soil had security for their capital, and were enabled to employ and pay their labourers, pauperism would constantly increase, and the depression of the rural population remain undiminished. He also strongly complained of the inequitable mode of the administration of the laws with regard to game. The magistrates belonged to a class, nine out of ten of whom were in favour of protection to game. Mr. Bright then showed the serious effect of these laws upon the morals of the labouring classes. In order to find sport for 40,000 persons at the utmost, not less than about 5000 men were every year subjected to fines and imprisonment for offences against the Game Laws. The true principle of legislation on this question was that, while we gave to every man protection for his property, we should at the same time give no special encouragement or sanction by law to the preservation of game. 'You build churches and endow schools; and you profess a sincere wish that the labouring population of this country should be elevated and civilised; and yet you maintain a system which, by the evidence of your own committees, and by the testimony of all your courts of justice, has done more to de-

moralise the peasantry than any other thing which can, perhaps, be mentioned.'

In the session of 1849, the Protectionists, by a side issue, endeavoured to secure a partial re-adoption of their principles. They claimed that the agricultural classes were entitled to compensation and relief under the loss of the lately repealed protecting duties. Mr. Disraeli brought the whole subject of the burdens on land before the House by a resolution which proposed to alleviate the difficulties of the landowners by throwing a portion of the rates then assessed upon their property into the general taxation of the country. The mover of the resolution delivered a lengthy and ingenious speech in support of his proposal. Sir Charles Wood (Chancellor of the Exchequer) opposed the motion, and showed that in many European countries a far greater proportion of taxation was borne by the land than in England.

Mr. Bright spoke during the debate, and maintained from statistics adduced, that no ground had been laid for any change in the existing burdens upon the land, which could be justified, either by the present condition of the tenant farmer, or of the prices of agricultural produce in the English markets. Having endeavoured to penetrate the veil of mystery in which Mr. Disraeli's proposition was enveloped, the hon. member remarked—

'It appears to me that it is a proposition intended to withdraw burdens to the amount of some £6,000,000 per annum from certain shoulders on which they are now saddled, and to impose them upon others—to relieve, in short, those who now carry them, by transferring them to those who hitherto have not borne them. The hon. gentleman's scheme of redistribution would probably reimpose £3,000,000 on those from whom he would take the present aggregate of £6,000,000, and apportion the other £3,000,000 to other classes of the community. Well; but the £3,000,000 that he would so withdraw from those who at present pay £6,000,000 would by no means represent the real proportion in which hon. gentlemen opposite desire to relieve the land from its present liabilities, or of the enhanced value which their scheme would practically confer upon the land generally. Assuming the whole aggregate of land in this kingdom capable of cultivation to represent an increase equal to what it has been stated at by gentlemen opposite, a rise in the value of the fee-simple of an acre, consequent on the remission of three millions of taxation on that aggregate, would be equivalent to 2 per cent., or £60,000,000 sterling. An increased value of 2 per cent would represent £120,000,000 as the increased value of the land, supposing it to be brought for sale into the market, or that the Legislature sanctioned such

a proposition as that which is now before it. I, for one, do not think that these are times in which the Legislature could be brought to listen to any such proposition. It is not likely, I trust, to meet with much favour from this House.'

Mr. Bright, in continuing, said that Mr. Disraeli's proposition was not less extraordinary than unjust. He would relieve the English landed interest, but had not a single word to say for Scotch agriculturists, while all he could give to Ireland was advice. The proposal, in fact, reminded him of an old story. 'It happened once, in a country town, and an agricultural district, that a company of strolling players proposed to get up a performance "for the benefit of the poor" of the neighbourhood. It was calculated by those who announced this intention that the object of contributing towards the relief of the poor would certainly induce the gentry to come forward generously in supporting the performance; and the event proved the soundness of this anticipation. But when it came to a question as to how the proceeds were to be appropriated, the strolling company claimed them all for themselves, on the principle that they themselves were "the poor" intended.' Mr. Disraeli would procure this boon for the tenant farmers, although he would not go for the repeal of the malt tax. He (Mr. Bright) was not one of those who thought that the people at large would be much the happier for being relieved from the malt tax; but that tax was injurious to agriculture, and oppressive upon the working-labourer and consumer. But with regard to repeal, and hon. gentlemen opposite—

'Their lips are now forbid to speak  
That once familiar word.'

They were told to wait till the proper time should arrive. With regard to the question of Free Trade, Mr. Bright said—

'Let hon. gentlemen beware how they turn their attention to the question of the reimposition of the duties upon corn. If you do so, you are attempting that which, I believe, is as impossible as the repeal of any Act which has passed this House in former times. You might probably effect the repeal of the Reform Bill or the Catholic Emancipation Act in the same session as that in which you reimpose the duty upon corn. Take care what you are about. Hon. gentlemen fancy that there is a lull in the public mind; that events abroad have frightened people at home. Bear in mind that in all the European capitals a system is being established which will have



a strange effect upon the minds of the people in this country, who are looking, and wisely looking, to great and permanent changes in the constitution of Parliament; and that whilst your conduct is encouraging such ideas, you are leading the farmers of England in the pursuit of that false and uncertain light which must land them hereafter in the midst of difficulties much greater than those which encompass them at present.'

They spoke as though Free Trade had failed; and because the system of Protection was abolished, had wreaked their vengeance upon a Minister. 'You have scattered a powerful party—you have shown an anger which political parties in this country have scarcely ever exhibited, because through the power, and I will say the patriotism, of the Minister whom you discarded, the industry of this great and growing population has escaped from the pressure of that screw which, through the medium of the Corn Laws, you had laid upon the necessities of life.' Touching, in conclusion, upon Mr. Hume's amendment for a reduction in the public expenditure, Mr. Bright warned the House that not many sessions would pass before they would be compelled to vote for the measure he recommended.

Mr. Hume's amendment having been first negatived, Mr. Disraeli's resolution was put to the House, and negatived by 280 to 189.

In the session of 1851, the subject was again discussed, under a somewhat different motion, in connection with agricultural distress, also introduced by Mr. Disraeli. The resolution ran as follows: 'That in any relief to be granted by the remission or adjustment of taxation, due regard should be paid to the distressed condition of the owners and occupiers of land in the United Kingdom.' Mr. Bright applied himself to a direct reply to Mr. Disraeli's speech. He observed that he had now left out of view the agricultural labourers, while he had not brought anything like proof, first of all that the owners and occupiers of land were suffering much, or, indeed, that they were suffering at all; and, secondly, he had failed to show that they had any special claim to relief, even if they were suffering. There were cases of difficulty among landowners—and particularly in Ireland; but there was no class which passed so triumphantly through every commercial hurricane and disaster as did the class of landed proprietors. He denied altogether that the

landowners were suffering to an extent which required that they should be pointed out as an ill-used class. Their investments had recently paid better than those of the manufacturers. With regard to the occupiers, he believed that some distress must necessarily arise from the circumstance that the prices of farm produce were temporarily depressed. But Mr. Bright brought forward statistics establishing the significant fact that the land of England and Wales paid in 1833 double the poor-rate which it paid in 1850. The springing up of manufacturing towns and villages in every direction, with their taxation to the poor-rate, relieved to a certain extent the land from the burdens to which it had been subjected. Undoubtedly, however, the condition of the tenant-farmer was one which every man must regard with sympathy. Those who suffered most notoriously held more land than they had capital to cultivate. If landowners bought land only to obtain political influence, they were on the road to ruin. If a tenant-farmer took more land than he could properly cultivate in reference to his capital, he was also on the road to ruin. There was one thing that operated most injuriously against the farmers, and that was the Game Laws. The tenant-farmers could not at once jump into a state of unequivocal prosperity. 'If they do get into a better position, it can only be by paths which are very evident; in some cases, by reductions in the rents; in other cases, by increase of produce; and in most cases, by a more successful adaptation of the powers of their farms to the production of those articles which the markets would be most willing to take from them.' Mr. Bright having shown that there was a considerable diminution of crime generally throughout the country, said in conclusion, 'I believe in my conscience that if you talk here for ever of agricultural distress, you will still find that there is no remedy which it is in the power of Parliament to give. The only possible chance for the farmers is in the exercise of those virtues and those talents by which the rest of their countrymen thrive; and if they exercise their own energies, and cultivate the quality of self-reliance, I am convinced that this country, with the finest roads, with the best markets, and with a favourable climate, will be found to triumph not only in her manufactures, but also in her agriculture.'

Mr. Disraeli's motion on this occasion was only rejected by the narrow majority of 13, in a House composed of 513 members. Mr. Bright's insistence upon the principles of Free Trade was perfectly thorough in all matters into which those principles entered, as well as regarded their effect upon agriculture. Thus during the debates in connection with the repeal of the Navigation Laws, he said that he supported the repeal of those laws on the broad ground on which he had supported free trade in corn—namely, that the people of this country had an undoubted right to the best and cheapest transit of the produce of their industry. Adam Smith had most reluctantly tolerated navigation laws, not on the ground of protection to shipping, but for the purpose of maintaining that naval influence which this country had been so anxious—often he (Mr. Bright) believed unwisely—to possess.

Questions affecting the representation of the people and Parliamentary Reform arose frequently in the House of Commons during the sessions with which we are now dealing. On the 4th of June 1849, for example, Mr. Hume moved for leave to bring in a Bill to Amend the National Representation. This proposed measure included household suffrage, the ballot, triennial Parliaments, and a more equal proportion of representatives to population. The scheme was supported by Mr. Berkeley, Mr. Locke King, Mr. Bright, and Mr. Bernal Osborne, and opposed by Sir George Grey, Mr. Newdegate, Lord John Russell, and others. Mr. Bright, in the course of his speech, said that in all civilised nations there was a movement in favour of a Government more under the control of the people, and more in accordance with their interests. The measure proposed by Mr. Hume was in accordance with the theory of the constitution; the existing mode of representation was not consistent with that theory, nor with the interests of the nation; it excluded masses of the community, qualified by knowledge and moral culture for the franchise, from their just privileges and rights. Lord John Russell's argument that further change was unnecessary, as Parliament had passed good measures since the Reform Act, would prove that that Act itself was unnecessary; but even now Parliament turned a deaf ear to suggestions for the diminution of taxation, and the present

system engendered discontent amongst large classes of the country, which it would be better now, before they were exasperated, to remove, by proving that the old system of compelling Parliament to do justice had gone by.

At this time Mr. Dickens' novels had become very popular, and Mr. Bright, we doubt not, read and admired them. In the following passage from the speech with which we are now concerned there is a reference to an amusing passage in one of the great humorist's novels :—

'An illustrious member of Sir Robert Peel's Government declared, in 1829, that the sole alternative of Catholic Emancipation was civil war, and to avert civil war emancipation was granted; surely it was not a wise constitution which allowed things to grow to such a pass. The noble lord's Reform Bill was passed in a hurricane of popular feeling, without which it would not have passed at all. The constitution was helped on by brickbats, the carriages of the noble lords and hon. gentlemen who opposed the measure being smashed over and over again, in many towns and villages of this country; surely it was not a perfect constitution that required the fillip of brickbats. Mr. Dickens has a story of a Captain Cuttle, who, in making a boy a present of a very large watch, tells him that if he only puts it on a quarter of an hour every morning at breakfast, and half an hour every day at dinner, it will do him credit; but whatever the case with Captain Cuttle's watch, the constitution which needs such vehement jerks to keep it moving, is scarcely one of a very creditable description. . . . I can have no respect for a constitution, or a system of representation or legislation, which requires the menace of civil war ere it will grant Catholic Emancipation—which must call in the aid of brickbats to enable it to give the Reform Bill—and which must be driven into the Sale of the Encumbered Estates Bill by the starvation of half a million of the people of Ireland.'

Mr. Hume's motion was lost by 268 to 82; but in the small band of advanced Liberals were included the names of Mr. M. T. Bass, Mr. Bouverie, Mr. Bright, Sir W. Clay, Mr. Cobden, Mr. (afterwards Lord Chief Justice) Cockburn, Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. Locke King, Sir W. Molesworth, Mr. Bernal Osborne, Mr. Villiers, Lord Dudley Stuart, and Mr. Page Wood, afterwards Lord Hatherley.

Early in the session of 1851 Mr. Locke King, moved for leave to bring in a bill to extend the franchise in counties to £10 occupiers, and the motion was carried against Government by 100 votes to 52.

In the ensuing April, however, when the second reading of Mr. King's bill came on, a different result occurred, the bill being lost by 299 to 83. Mr. Bright spoke in its support, observing that Lord John Russell had admitted that the class was entitled to the franchise, but had, at the same time, suggested constitutional reasons why a franchise suited for boroughs was not suited for counties. He (Mr. Bright) thought the House might discuss this bill in order to see whether it should not form part of the proposed general measure. This was not a question of principle, as regarded the suffrage, but merely one of limits. A measure of this kind ought not to be looked at as a means of placing Whigs or Protectionists in office, but to be taken on its own principle, and with reference to the particular class of persons intended to be enfranchised.

There was, however, a very strong opposition to the bill, and, as we have seen, it was lost by a large majority. When Lord John Russell introduced his Reform Bill in 1852, Mr. Bright said that although he disapproved of some portions of the measure, which fell short of what the country expected, there were yet other portions which would give some degree of satisfaction to large classes. He regretted that Lord John had not, by the ballot, taken out of the hands of employers the strong temptation to exercise a most coercive influence, and that in a manner which was degrading to those who were under them in social relations, and which would be hurtful both to the House and the country. Something ought also to have been done with regard to the small boroughs. He thought the county franchise, reduced to £20, still too high, and urged that the principle of disfranchisement should have been carried further, that larger constituencies should have additional representatives, or that new constituencies should be created. A Ministerial crisis occurring shortly after the introduction of the bill, nothing further was done with the measure of 1852.

During the debate on Mr. Berkeley's motion for the adoption of the ballot in 1853, Mr. Bright, in supporting the proposition, showed that the number of election petitions had risen from 33 in the year 1833, to 67 in 1853. There had been since the Reform Bill 315 petitions, and it needed no argument to show that, under these

circumstances, the House stood in a position of considerable humiliation before the country and the world. The hon. member entered into lengthy details showing the kind of pressure exercised upon constituencies, for which the ballot would be an almost certain remedy. If they did not wish to appear hypocrites in the eyes of the world, it became hon. members either to point out a remedy as good as that of the hon. member's for Bristol, or to vote for the introduction of this bill, in order that it might be sent to the other House of Parliament. The House, however, decided against Mr. Berkeley's motion by 232 to 172.

Twice Mr. Bright spoke upon the question of Church-rates. Supporting Mr. Trelawny's motion for a select committee on this subject in the session of 1851, he illustrated the grievances of Dissenters in regard to forcible seizures of property for rates. The question was one of only some £250,000 a year, and he exhorted Churchmen to settle it for ever. The law was most dubious with regard to these rates; and there were no two lawyers in the kingdom who would give the same opinion in reference to them. Whatever Minister might be in power, he would find it beneficial to the interests of the Church to make a clean sweep of all matters which were not alone unjust towards the Dissenters, but materially injurious to the Church itself. A committee was appointed, but its report when presented contained no conclusion. The question consequently came up again in 1853, when Dr. Phillimore moved to bring in a bill to alter and amend the law respecting Church-rates. Sir W. Clay proposed an amendment in favour of the abolition of the rates. Mr. Bright thought that provision might be made for the repair of churches out of Church property. The question of Church-rates, if the House chose to grapple with it, was very simple. If a bill was passed, merely abolishing those rates without any other provision, sufficient sums, in his opinion, would be raised by voluntary contributions in every parish for the repair of the fabric of the Church. The pleasure resulting from the abolition of Church-rates would not be confined to Dissenters, but would be largely shared in by those who were members of the Church. The House, however, was not yet sufficiently advanced in opinion to do this.

The amendment was rejected by 207 to 185, and Dr. Phillimore's original motion by 220 to 172.

Taxes on knowledge, and all restrictions upon the freedom of the press, have ever had a strong opponent in Mr. Bright. Several instances of this occurred in the session of 1853. A question arose in February respecting the Peace Society and the enlistment for the Militia. Certain persons in Buckinghamshire having distributed placards animadverting on the Militia Bill, the Government ordered a prosecution. Mr. Bright condemned the prosecution of persons who had merely attempted to dissuade others from entering the militia by distributing a few illustrated placards. The present Emperor of the French complained more of the pictures in *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News* than the articles, because his people understood the one and not the other; but it was monstrous that in this free country, the monarch of which was so much beloved, and the Government one in which so many persons placed confidence, that people, for circulating a few placards such as he had described, should be rendered amenable to a prosecution. Lord Palmerston, who had previously attacked the Peace Society, announced that the prosecutions had been absolutely and entirely stopped, but in stating this he again attacked the members of the 'Society,' as being 'much too good to be entrusted with any political functions in this wicked and sinful world.' His lordship, nevertheless, subsequently found that many of the members of the Society were men who must be reckoned with, and who were by no means to be despised.

In the House of Commons, on the 14th of April 1853, Mr. Milner Gibson brought forward the subject of the taxes upon knowledge. He moved three resolutions, to the effect that the advertisement duty ought to be repealed; that the policy of subjecting the cheap periodical press to stamp duties and other restrictions was inexpedient; that the law relative to taxes on newspapers was in an unsatisfactory state; and, lastly, that the Excise duty on paper materially obstructed good cheap literature, and that the maintenance of this tax as a permanent source of revenue would be impolitic, and would impede the progress of education.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer admitted that the law relating to taxes on newspapers was in an unsatisfactory state, but thought the House would set a mischievous precedent by condemning taxes on isolated grounds, without regard to the expenditure of the country. Mr. Bright, in supporting the motion, said that Mr. Gibson's speech had not been answered. These duties were not brought forward as unjust taxes, but as instruments which restrained the press; and it was time that a Government professing a regard for education should deal with these taxes. It was not a question of revenue, for it could be shown that if the advertisement and stamp duties were abolished, the loss of revenue would be so small as not to be put in the balance against the advantages which would arise from it. Lord Brougham had said that the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge had found it impossible to reach those classes of society, of which the agricultural labourers formed the chief portion, with their publications. For those classes the existing newspapers were too large and too expensive, and treated of matters quite beyond their limited information. They had in them more than the peasant had the heart to read: he wanted to know little about foreign affairs, but everything that was applicable to his own condition. Nothing was more true than the remark that what a man did know must be made the medium of communicating information to him; and when you interested his faculties in a variety of subjects, and enlarged his circle of information, you might at last have an educated people. Referring to mischievous publications, Mr. Bright held that the only way to counteract their evil tendency was to make the press free—to make the press the censor and corrector of the press. With the general agreement which existed in the opinion that the people should have no restrictions placed on their education, that free discussion was the law of the constitution, and the law of the prevalent religion of this country, he could not believe that the House would permit any Chancellor of the Exchequer for any long period to insist on maintaining taxes which placed restrictions on the means of education.

Mr. Cobden said he felt so strongly on this matter, that after giving the subject of national education his patient and constant



study for many years, he came to the deliberate conviction that it was better that the taxes upon knowledge should be removed to-morrow, than even that all the votes at present granted to promote educational purposes should be continued. Upon a division, Mr. Gibson's first resolution was carried against the Government by 200 to 169, the second was negatived by 280 to 98, and the third by 270 to 80. On the 1st of July the question was again discussed, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer moved a resolution that the advertisement duty should be reduced to sixpence. Mr. Milner Gibson moved an amendment that all duties chargeable on advertisements be repealed, in accordance with the resolution passed on the 14th of April.

Mr. Bright, in opposing Mr. Gladstone's resolution, said the Chancellor of the Exchequer would find that if the advertisement duty were wholly repealed, there would be an enormous gain from the Post Office alone. He would receive more than the sixpence from the letters passing through the Post Office which the advertisements would occasion. The Stamp Act was allowed so to work that it fell almost exclusively upon political newspapers. It was scandalous that such a state of things should be allowed to exist. Having described the creditable manner in which the *New York Tribune* was produced, and its fulness of information, Mr. Bright asked the Government how it was—and for what good end and by what contrivance of fiscal oppression—that an English workman should have to pay fivepence for a London morning paper, while his direct competitor in New York could buy a paper for one penny. We were running a race in the face of all the world with the United States; but with such things there could not possibly be any fair rivalry between the artisans of the two countries. There was nothing in this country that was taxed to so scandalous an amount, as a mere matter of industry. There was an overwhelming case for the total abolition of all taxes upon the press. The stamp was kept from fear that what passed in that House, and all political information, should become free and cheap to the people; and not wishing to avow that, the argument of fiscal difficulties was used in order to maintain a tax which was perhaps the most disgraceful

that in the year 1853 remained upon the Statute-book of the country.

Mr. Gladstone consented to Mr. Milner Gibson's amendment relating to pamphlets and other literary works, provided they were not continued periodically. The question that sixpence stand part of the resolution was negatived by 68 against 63, leaving the Government in a minority of five. The Chairman then put the resolution as amended, with a cypher instead of sixpence, and in that form it was carried by 70 against 61. So that the cause of the freedom of the press triumphed.

On the subject of oaths, Mr. Bright expressed himself on several occasions. When the Parliamentary Oaths Bill of 1849 was discussed, he said he was prepared to maintain that every man who, under the constitution, was elected a member of that House, had a fair right, on all the principles of that constitution, to enter that House on the same terms and with the same powers as other members, and was to be considered fully entitled to exercise his judgment upon, and to vote upon, any and all subjects that came before him. Oaths were not necessary or effectual for any good purpose; and no man could pretend that civil or religious equality in that House was complete so long as this system prevailed. He believed that the public respect for truth would be greatly increased were oaths abolished altogether, and men taught that the pledge of their word and their honour laid an obligation upon them the most impressive that could be imposed.

Again, when the remarkable case of Mr. Alderman Salomons occurred in 1851, Mr. Bright took part in the debate. Mr. Salomons, a member of the Jewish community, had been elected member for Greenwich, and determined to take his seat. He repeated the oath of abjuration at the table of the House of Commons, but omitted the concluding words, 'on the true faith of a Christian.' Being directed by the Speaker to withdraw, he at first took his seat in the House, but afterwards retired below the bar.

A discussion ensued, which was eventually postponed. On the 21st of July, Mr. Salomons again entered the House, and took his

seat on the Ministerial benches. A very stormy debate followed, and three divisions took place, in two of which Mr. Salomons himself voted. Mr. Bethell delivered an opinion in favour of the competency of Mr. Salomons to sit upon taking the oath as he had done; but Sir F. Thesiger maintained a contrary opinion.

Mr. Bright rose and said that he would not go into the question of law, for as far as law was concerned they were completely in the dark. As to precedent, the House had done more in 1832 than it was now asked to do. In the case of Mr. Pease, the House left out the words 'on the true faith of a Christian;' he was a Christian, and there was no need for the omission. He did not like to use the words 'on the true faith of a Christian,' because he understood the expression to be in the nature of an oath,—and to oaths of any kind the Society of Friends entertained a conscientious and insurmountable objection,—and the House dropped them. But it did more—it did not require him to promise to defend the Crown; and it, moreover, absolved him from taking several oaths, and permitted him to make one affirmation. 'Why, then, if members of the Society of Friends, being Christians, were permitted to omit these particular words from their Parliamentary declaration, was Mr. Salomons, not being a Christian, to be compelled to repeat those words, he declaring them to be in no way binding upon his conscience, and offering, at the same time, to take the oath which was binding on his conscience? The people of this country were loyal enough without these oaths. No men were sent there who needed to be bound in their allegiance to the Sovereign, or their obedience to the law, by any oaths whatsoever, especially by such oaths as those passed two or three centuries ago. He should like some clean sweep to be made of these oaths, and that they should regard each other, as he believed they were, as patriotic citizens of their country coming there to do that which was their duty to their country, and not binding themselves in the slightest degree by those antiquated forms of asseveration which our ancestors of old had enacted, and which were totally unsuited to the times in which we lived.

Mr. Salomons being called upon, addressed the House in a short

speech. On a vote being taken, the House affirmed by 231 against 81 the motion that Mr. Salomons should withdraw. The hon. member refused to do so unless compelled, whereupon the Sergeant-at-Arms was directed to remove him, and he then retired. On the following day Lord John Russell moved a resolution denying the right of Mr. Salomons to sit until he had taken the usual oath. The debate was prolonged through two evenings, and after several amendments and divisions the original motion was carried by 123 to 63.

In the session of 1853 the question of the Jewish Disabilities was again debated, and Lord John Russell brought in a bill for their abolition. The bill passed its first and second readings by considerable majorities. A further debate ensued on the third reading on the 15th of April, and during this debate Mr. Bright delivered a lengthy speech. He observed that the sentiment against the bill had now sunk down to the phrase that they were about to unchristianise the House of Commons. It always seemed to him that this feeling came from that appetite for supremacy which sprang from the fact that we had in England a powerful and dominant Church, connected chiefly with a powerful ruling class, and that step by step the people of this country, one section after another, had wrested from that Church, and that class, the rights of citizenship which they claimed, and which they now enjoyed. 'Now, what can be more marvellous,' asked Mr. Bright, 'than that any sane man should propose that doctrinal differences in religion should be made the test of citizenship and political rights? Doctrinal differences in religion, in all human probability, will last for many generations to come, and may possibly last so long as man shall inhabit this globe; but if you permit these differences to be the tests of citizenship, what is it but to admit into your system this fatal conclusion, that social and political differences in all nations can never be eradicated, but must be eternal?'

Referring to Sir H. Inglis, one of the members for Oxford University, as a person who drew his political morality from the Old Testament Scriptures, Mr. Bright said: 'I cannot see, if the hon. baronet takes his public morality from these writings, and if Baron

Rothschild takes his from the same source, and if the question of citizenship be not a matter of doctrinal religion, but of the due performance of our duties to each other and to the State—I cannot see why the hon. baronet should, for thirty or forty years, have sat in this House, and Baron Rothschild, elected by the first constituency of the kingdom, be shut out.’ But he (Mr. Bright) was told that there was an awful power in another place. He did not mean Lords Temporal so much as Lords Spiritual. He had no great opinion of bishops in any case. But of all subjects, this was about the very last on which he should like to take the opinion of the bishops of the Church of England. High titles, vast revenues, great power, conferred upon Christian ministers, were as without warrant to his mind in Scripture as in reason. They could not give an unbiassed, impartial judgment on a question like this.

The House of Commons had decided in favour of this bill; and if the House of Commons represented the country, the country was in favour of the bill. Fourteen times the measure had been carried by large majorities, but it had been rejected by the other House, sometimes almost with contempt. ‘If the British constitution affords no remedy for this state of things, it is not worth all the boasting which the noble lord and others have heaped upon it. There are two remedies for this evil. The one is the creation of new peers. Do not for a moment imagine that I should recommend it. I think the remedy might be worse than the disease; but that is one of the remedies, as I understand it, which the constitution offers to the Crown in cases of this nature, provided the case be of sufficient magnitude.’ Then there was another remedy—that of a ferment or agitation in the country. He had seen ferments in the country, but did not much admire them. He wanted arguments and sound principles of legislation to prevail within the Houses of Parliament, and not the fear of anything that might take place outside. But the bill must be passed. ‘I cannot say,’ continued Mr. Bright, ‘whether there is any other remedy than the creation of peers, and agitation out of doors; but let it be a resolution on the part of the Government that this bill shall pass—that they will make it a matter on which their existence, as a Government, shall

be staked—and if it should not be passed, upon those persons be the responsibility of forming a Government who shall prevent this measure of justice to the Jewish population of this country.' He begged the House to get rid of this question, and to see that the Commons House of England was open to the Commons of England, and that every man, whatever his creed, if elected by a constituency of his countrymen, should sit in that House, and vote on all matters which affected the legislation of the kingdom.

The third reading of the bill was carried by 288 to 230. When it came before the House of Lords, however, on the motion of the Earl of Shaftesbury, the second reading was negatived by 164 to 115, so that the bill was once more lost.

One more important question in Parliament demands attention. Early in 1851 a panic prevailed in England on the subject of Papal aggression. The See of Rome had created an Archbishop of Westminster, and the organisation of the heads of the Romish Church in this country had been generally changed without the knowledge or consent of the Government. The public excitement over this step was greatly increased by Lord John Russell's famous 'Durham letter,' and the cry of 'No Popery' was raised. On the assembling of Parliament, the Prime Minister accordingly introduced the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, a measure which prohibited Catholic bishops from assuming any title from any place or territory within the United Kingdom. A long debate took place on the 7th of February, on Lord John Russell's moving for leave to introduce the bill.

Amongst those who strongly opposed the measure was Mr. Bright. He began by remarking that the worst he would say of Lord John's letter was that it was written under feelings of excitement which were hardly becoming a Prime Minister, and which would not add to the noble lord's character as a judicious statesman. But he had appealed to the bigotry of the country. The end of all this excitement was not yet. There was a belief that the Roman Catholic religion was making rapid strides in the United Kingdom, and that this measure of the Pope was an indication of its progress; and thinking, as he did, that it would be a calamity to this kingdom

if it should return to Catholicism, he proceeded to inquire how far our past policy had been calculated to make this a Protestant empire. In the course of this inquiry, Mr. Bright described the Irish Church, abounding in wealth, and leagued, as he affirmed, with the civil power in acts of oppression, as being at the root of the extended Catholicism of Ireland. And how had our legislation acted with regard to the Roman Catholic religion in England? According to the noble lord's letter, the Church of England, which had been called the bulwark of Protestantism, was a kind of manufactory of home Popery. Notwithstanding the power and influence of the episcopacy in England, and its revenues, the depth of which the plummet of inquiry had never sounded, not only had the Church of England not saved the country from Popery, but it was said to be deeply infected with it; yet it was the ascendancy of this Church that the bill of the noble lord was intended to bolster up, and which he believed would be impotent for the object in view. 'I will neither legislate against the Catholics,' said Mr. Bright, 'nor in support of the Establishment; and however much the noble lord may succeed in gratifying the passions or in satisfying the prejudices of his followers out of doors, I see nothing but evil in the course he is pursuing, and therefore I must withhold my consent from this mischievous bill.'

At the close of a four nights' debate, there was an enormous majority for Ministers, the numbers being—for the introduction of the bill, 395; against, 63. In consequence of a Ministerial crisis which occurred shortly afterwards, the bill dropped; but upon the resumption of office by the Whig Government, it was reintroduced with some alterations. On the order for the second reading on the 7th of March, Sir George Grey explained the provisions of the amended measure. Its leading features, however, remained the same. A debate which lasted for seven nights occurred on the second reading. The bill was opposed by the Earl of Arundel and Surrey, Mr. Roundell Palmer (Lord Selborne), Mr. Cardwell, Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Hume, and Mr. Gladstone; and supported by Sir Robert Peel (in a maiden speech), Sir George Grey, and others. The second reading was carried by 438 to 95. Further lengthy

discussions took place in committee, and at various stages of the bill; and during one of these debates, on the 12th of May, Mr. Bright delivered a second important speech against the measure. After condemning certain speeches made at the Mansion House by high officers of the Crown, the hon. member said that he had observed almost all that had appeared in the papers during this agitation, and as yet there had been no logical definition of the injury that had been inflicted on the country, and no agreement as to any remedy which Parliament could provide. The noble lord was now conscious of his difficulty with regard to Ireland, but he could not withdraw Ireland without overthrowing the whole speech upon which his legislation was founded. The noble lord objected to the Synod of Thurles; but if the two churches were compared, they must be driven to the conclusion that the Protestant bishops and clergy were quite as meddlesome in politics as the Catholics, and more especially upon this very question of national education. An instance could not be cited in which the Catholic bishops of Ireland had broken the law; and although he despised and loathed the language of the Pope, it was rather a form than a substance.

As to the alleged attack on the supremacy of the Crown by a foreign Power, said Mr. Bright, 'the supremacy of the Queen is, in the sense used by the noble lord, no better than a fiction. There might have been such a supremacy down to the times of James II., but now there is no supremacy but that of the three estates of the realm, and the supremacy of the law. The Queen is the chief of the Established Church; but that Church has not been assailed either in its wealth or power. The Queen has not the power of making Roman Catholic bishops, and therefore the making of them by the only Power on earth that has authority to make them, is no invasion of the prerogative of the Crown.' One Church always looked upon another as a usurper. He was no friend to bishops of any Church, but if they were necessary for the Anglican Church, who could say they were not necessary for the Church of Rome? If the bishops were natives here, and appointed with the consent of those over whom they would subsequently exercise control, it was reasonable



to suppose that the Roman Catholic Church would become more national in character than when ruled over by the Pope and the statutes of his council. 'The noble lord has designated the proceeding as an insult to the Crown, and an attack on the independence of the nation. I wish he could get rid of the silly and groundless fears he entertains on these points. To talk of this nation, its Crown and independence, being menaced by a petty sovereign or prince at Rome, is really too ludicrous.' Yet the country was misled by these phrases, which were so misused by the Prime Minister.

The question now was not one of Protestantism but of politics. The Pope and Cardinal Wiseman had acted foolishly; but the noble lord did not touch them. The true sufferers would be the wearer of the Crown, and the millions of subjects professing the Roman Catholic religion. The Romish Church would take fresh hope from the paroxysm of terror and alarm into which the Protestants of England had thrown themselves. It was evident that the Prime Minister was in a quagmire, and he knew it well. It would be far better for the interests of the Crown, of the Kingdom, of the House, and of Christianity, if the bill were withdrawn, instead of being proceeded with. The bill was repudiated by all classes, and the press repudiated it. It was well understood that the noble lord was practising a cheat, a delusion on the people of England. This measure, while it insulted Roman Catholics, offered no defence to Protestants. Men who were really attached to the Church of England were not in favour of the measure. Some members were disposed to yield to the cry for the bill.

'We ought to resist the cry, to stem the torrent; and it will be infinitely more honourable to go home to our avocations, if we have any, and abandon public life for ever, in defence of principles we have always held to be true, rather than be instruments of a cry to create discord between the Irish and English nations, and to perpetuate animosities which the last twenty-five years have done much to lessen. We are here to legislate calmly and deliberately, without reference to the passions and contending factions that may rage out of doors; we are in a position to see that the course in which the noble lord has been so recklessly dragging us is fruitful in discord, hatred, religious animosities—that it has separated Ireland from this country, has withdrawn her national sympathies from us, and has done an amount of mischief which the legislation of the next ten years cannot entirely, if at all, abate.'

Mr. Bright maintained that if the Premier had foreseen all the difficulties arising out of this bill, he would not have touched it ; but he would not now withdraw it, because it would be humiliating to do so. Yet it was equally humiliating to go on with it, for no practical end could result from it. With this effective passage the hon. member concluded his speech :—

‘The noble lord has drawn up an indictment against eight millions of his countrymen ; he has increased the power of the Pope over the Roman Catholics, for he has drawn closer the bonds between them and their Church and the head of their Church. The noble lord has quoted Queen Elizabeth and the great men of the Commonwealth, as though it were necessary now to adopt the principles which prevailed almost universally two hundred years ago. Does the noble lord forget that we are the true ancients, that we stand on the shoulders of our forefathers and can see farther ? We have seen the working of these principles, and their result, and have concluded to abandon them.

‘I have not touched on any matter purely religious ; this House is not the place for religious questions. But reflecting on the deep mysteries of religion, on my own doubts and frailties, on the shortness of the present time, and on the awful and unknown future, I ask, What am I that I should judge another in religious things, and condemn him to exclusion and persecution ? I fear not for the country on questions like this. England, with a united population—though the noble lord has done much to disunite them—cares nothing for foreign potentates, be their combinations what they may. England, with her free press, her advancing civilisation, her daily and hourly progress in the arts, sciences, industry, and morals, will withstand any priestly attempts to subjugate the mind, and successfully resist any menaces, whether coming from Lambeth or from Rome. I am one of a sect which has invariably held the principles I now advocate, which has in past years suffered greatly from those principles which the noble lord now wishes to introduce into our Legislature. I cannot do otherwise than raise my voice against such an attempt, and ask the noble lord to proceed no further.’

The bill eventually passed both Houses of Parliament and became law ; but of all legislation of equal magnitude, and of all measures exciting an equal amount of feeling and interest, the Ecclesiastical Titles Act was probably the most ineffective and the most nugatory.

Some mention remains to be made of Mr. Bright’s appearances out of the House of Commons at this period. Before the question of Reform was mooted in the House, he attended a great meeting on the subject held in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, when some eight thousand persons were present. Mr. Cobden accompanied

him, and the speeches of the two members<sup>\*</sup> roused the men of Manchester to enthusiasm on this subject,—an enthusiasm, however, which was doomed to be somewhat cooled by the apathy of the Government of the day. The Peace Society, which for thirty years had convened periodical gatherings, held a meeting in the Town Hall, Birmingham, on the 27th of November 1850. The speakers included Mr. Joseph Sturge, the Rev. J. Angell James, Mr. Cobden, and Mr. Bright. The last named, after referring to the facilities for extending our intercourse with the European Continent and with the United States, and alluding also to the Great Exhibition, said: ‘We know such things as these are but the heralds of those promises which are certain to be fulfilled—promises handed down to us in the great Book—but for which the world would be in darkness, but wherein we gather the cheering consolation that there shall be peace from one end of the earth to the other. Cast your eyes back over the last thirty-five years; during the whole of that time we have had a profound peace, and have kept up war establishments notwithstanding, and have therefore gone on adding to our national debt until at length the amount of it has become so large that nobody can measure it, and nobody believes that it will ever be paid off. Look at Ireland; you have there 40,000 men maintained out of the taxes, and another 10,000 also maintained out of the taxes in the shape of armed police. Fifty thousand men in Ireland armed to keep the peace, under a system where peace is impossible, in a country where for years the misgovernment was such that in Europe it found no parallel.’

Before the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill was brought forward, but just in the midst of the agitation, Mr. Bright attended a meeting at Manchester, and spoke both with energy and humour on this question. ‘There has been,’ he said, ‘an attempt to frighten the country out of its propriety. I believe the cockneys have been very much frightened—I mean the parochial mind of the various divisions in London.’ But the state of feeling in the North had been entirely different, and he instanced Hull, Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool in proof of this. ‘All this attempt to distract the public mind—all this attempt to point the finger of scorn at millions of our fellow-

country-men who differ from us in religion—all this has failed amongst the three millions of population in the part of this kingdom we inhabit, the counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire. I do not know how it is, but there is some fatality about two things that the people of this country have been discussing for generations past—Corn and Catholics. This time last year there was almost terror about corn. Some people down here were afraid that corn was going to be shut out, and the squires were making a great disturbance about, not papal, but corn aggression. It is about five hundred years ago that there was a sort of Parliament—not, I believe, a very regular one—held at Kilkenny, where English interests very much preponderated. They passed what has been called the Statute of Kilkenny—a law by which they made it penal, in a high degree, for an Irishman's horse to graze upon an Englishman's land. Now from that time to this there has hardly been a session of Parliament when this question of Catholics has not been brought up; and old women of both sexes, in all parts of the country, have been frightening themselves to death about this Papal aggression.'

Towards the close of 1850 there was a considerable movement in the north of England for the establishment of freehold land societies. Rochdale, amongst other towns, had its society, and celebrated its first purchase of land by a *soirée* in the Public Hall, on the 31st of January 1851. The land, which was purchased at a cost of £10,000, was divided into about five hundred allotments. Mr. Bright was the president of the society, and in speaking at the meeting he observed that the project was not a visionary one; they were not to expect large estates or to have land for nothing; but the society was intended to enable great numbers of persons of limited incomes from wages to possess themselves of a small portion of land sufficient to build a house upon, and it would at any rate produce forty shillings a year rent; and there could be no doubt that the possession of such a portion of land would give them as clear a right to be upon the register of county voters as if they possessed a large quantity. The movement in Rochdale was very successful, and the greater portion of the land purchased by the society is now covered with residences.

When Mr. Sharman Crawford announced his intention, in April 1851, of retiring from the representation of Rochdale, on the ground of ill-health, a requisition was forwarded to Mr. Bright by the Liberal electors, begging that he would allow himself to be put in nomination at the next election for his native town. Mr. Bright wrote declining the invitation, but stating that he regarded this expression of the approbation of his townsmen, and their confidence in his political integrity, ample reward for any sacrifices he had made, and for such services as he had been able to render during his public life. It did not seem consistent with his public duty to abandon the post he then occupied. In the year 1847 he had been returned for Manchester without a contest, and he had no reason to suppose that his conduct had been otherwise than acceptable to those who had returned him for one of the very foremost constituencies in the United Kingdom. 'I cannot, therefore,' said the hon. member, 'abandon the position to which I have been called, and in which I am conscious only of honest efforts to maintain and advance the great principles upon which I claimed and secured the confidence of the electors of Manchester.' The Rochdale Liberals next applied to Mr. Edward Miall, whom they returned at the general election of 1852 by a substantial majority over the Conservative candidate, Captain Ramsay.

When Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, visited this country in 1851, he was received with great enthusiasm; but by no town or city was he more warmly welcomed than by Manchester. A meeting in his honour was held in the Free Trade Hall, and when Mr. Bright came forward to move an address to him the scene was most interesting and impressive. 'We are here,' said the member for Manchester, 'especially to express our sympathy with a great and noble nation, suffering from tyranny, from which this country happily has been for generations free. We are here to express our admiration for a most distinguished man, one of the most renowned defenders of liberty which our age and the world can boast of. I look upon him on this platform, a wanderer and an exile though he be, as far more illustrious to our eyes, and far more dear to our hearts, than any crowned head amongst the monarchs of continental Europe.

But there are men who say, "Why, what is the use of your sympathy if you have no regiments and no ships?" Well, I shall take another line of argument, and ask you whether there be any force in opinion, in opinion acting upon the nation. Let me ask you where you are assembled? Recollect when this Hall was built—recollect by whom it was built—recollect that from this platform and from this Hall went forth the voices which generated opinion in England, which concentrated it, which gathered it, little by little until it became a power before which huge majorities in both Houses of Parliament became impotent minorities, and the most august and powerful aristocracy of the world had to succumb—and finally, that through that opinion in this country we struck down for ever the most gigantic tyranny that was ever practised.' Mr. Bright also defended Kossuth in the House of Commons, when it was sought to cast aspersions upon his character.

In an address delivered before his constituents in May 1851, Mr. Bright—who appeared in conjunction with Mr. Milner Gibson—thus spoke of the relations between members and their constituents, and of the Manchester School: 'Notwithstanding that there is not a man in England with a higher idea of the exalted position of any one who, at all worthy, should occupy the place of your representative—yet when I speak of a vote in Parliament, I endeavour to shut out from my mind any idea of controlling influence down here or elsewhere. I am most happy, when I can, to agree with you; but I think there is a higher, loftier, purer standard for a representative than even the influence of those whom he may represent; and that standard is his own intelligent, conscientious convictions of duty on the question which is before him.' When the applause which followed this independent expression of opinion had subsided, the speaker continued: 'Now, we are called the "Manchester Party," and our policy is the "Manchester Policy," and this building I suppose is the schoolroom of the "Manchester School." I do not repudiate that name at all. I think it is an honour to ourselves, and an honour to you, that by your own intelligence, your sacrifices, your combination, your intrepidity, you have actually marked the impression of your mind and your convictions upon the policy of

the greatest empire of the globe. We have principles, and we intend to stand by them. Our principles are not rash—they are not unsound. We have no interest in public misfortune. Our industry thrives in peace; all that we have in the world depends upon the performance and success of whatever is valuable to the institutions of the country. I am not afraid of the future. We have not, as the chosen people of old had, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, to lead us through the wilderness of human passion and human error, but He who vouchsafed the cloud and the fire has not left us forsaken. We have a guide not less sure, a light not less clear; we have before us the great principles of justice and mercy which Christianity has taught us, and the advantages of philosophy and experience. Let us trust these principles. Let us believe that they exist for ever unchangeably in the providence of God; and if we build our national policy upon them, we may rest assured that we shall do all that lies in our power to promote that which is good, and which the patriotic amongst Englishmen have in all ages panted for—the lasting happiness and prosperity of this great nation.'

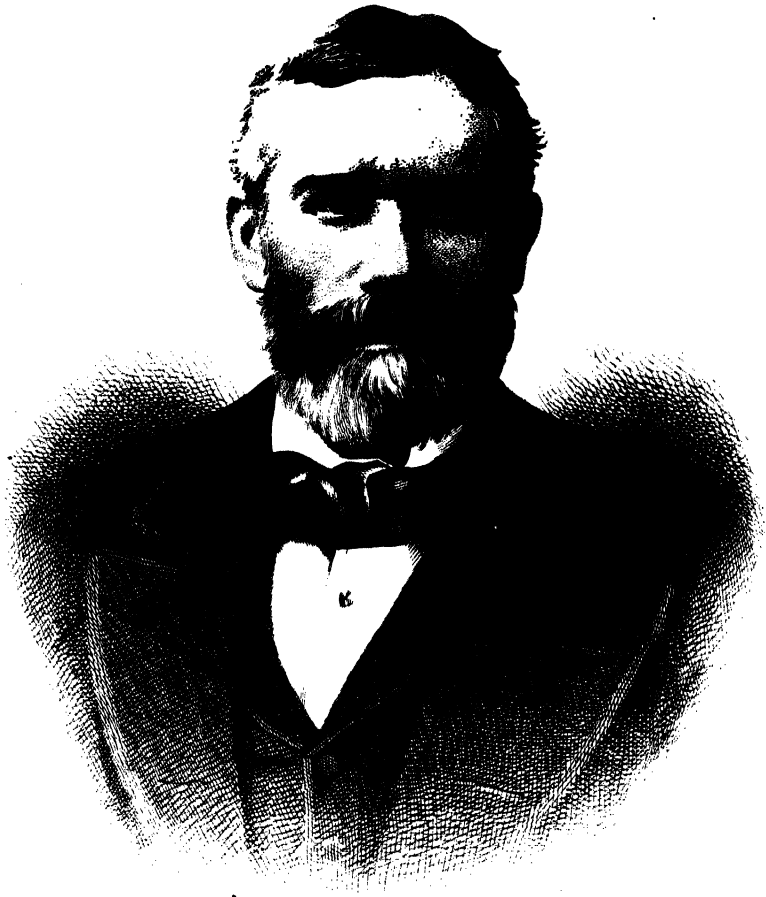
Mr. Bright, who has been a great reader of biography as well as history, referred to the former branch of literature in a speech which he made at the inauguration of the Manchester Free Library. It was a class of reading probably accomplished less ably and satisfactorily than some others; 'but still,' he said, 'there are in this library scores, probably hundreds, of admirable works of biography which you may read with the greatest benefit; and I may say for myself that there is no description of reading from which I rise, as I can myself discover, more improved by that which I have been engaged in, than when I rise from the study of the biographies of great and good men.' On the platform on this occasion, surrounding the speaker, were many distinguished writers who have added permanently to the literary treasures of the country, including Thackeray, Dickens, Lord Lytton, and Charles Knight.

Mr. Bright visited Ireland in the year 1852, and the occasion was seized by the influential merchants and other inhabitants of Belfast to entertain at a public banquet one who had rendered con-









*W. L. E. 1884.*

RIGHT HON GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN, M. P.

*Thomas G. Jackson, London, 1884.*



spicuous service to Ireland, whose general political career they also approved, and who had done so much to release trade from the fetters which formerly bound it. In his speech in response to the toast of the evening, Mr. Bright said, 'I have been in your country on this occasion for about a month. I have mixed with all classes, and I have observed as much as any ordinary man could observe within the same time. I have read much about Ireland, and everything leads me to say that this country is a sorrowful spectacle before the world, and that it is your duty, in this industrious town, to lead the way in the improvement of your native country.'

At the General Election of July 1852, the Conservatives determined to oppose the return of Mr. Milner Gibson and Mr. Bright. Candidates were found in the persons of Mr. George Loch, and Captain the Hon. Joseph Denman. The nomination took place in St. Ann's Square. Mr. Gibson's nomination was moved by Alderman Walker, and seconded by Sir E. Armitage; that of Mr. Bright being moved by Mr. Mark Philips, and seconded by Mr. George Wilson, the hon. member's old Free-trade colleague. The Liberal candidates had the show of hands by an enormous majority, and were also subsequently victorious at the poll, the numbers being—Gibson, 5752; Bright, 5475; Loch, 4360; and Capt. Denman, 3969.

The shadow of a great war already hung over Europe in the year 1853. There was at this period a strong war party in England, which lost no opportunity of spreading its ideas. Rumours of a great impending struggle were freely current; and the friends of peace endeavoured to counteract the prevailing feeling and sentiment on this question. A conference was held in the Manchester Corn Exchange on the 27th of January, followed by a public meeting in the evening, presided over by Mr. George Wilson. Mr. Bright, who was the chief speaker, said: 'We have had uneasiness, and unnecessary preparations for war; the tinder is abroad now, the train is laid, it wants but some accident to excite a spark to set off this in flames. Taxes imposed—some taxes not reduced—trade disturbed—no financial reforms in the coming session—no Reform Bill; and we are told by some of the writers of the Government,

the only thing now to be looked at is the defenceless condition of the country ; and if war should arise—if war should spring out of these insane proceedings, language wholly fails me to describe the disastrous consequences that must ensue. I draw no picture of blood and crime, of battles by sea and land ; they are common to every war, and nature shudders at the enormities of man ; but I see before me a vast commerce collapsed, a mighty industry paralysed, and people impoverished and exhausted with ever-increasing burdens, and a gathering discontent. I see this now peaceful land torn with factions—our now tranquil population suffering and ferocious, everything good quenched, and everything evil stimulated and exalted. I see sown, as it were, before my eyes, the seeds of internal convulsion and of rapid national decay, and in the mournful vision which must affect the sight of any man who looks forward to these events I behold this great nation, the prolific parent of half the future world, sunk into hopeless ruin, the victim of its own ignorance and credulity, and of the cowardice and crimes of its rulers.' Ill-fated destiny was moving onwards, however, and England was shortly to be engaged in the war in the East—a war amongst the most destructive in her history.

It has not been without value, we trust, that we have followed the course of Mr. Bright in regard to these various important public questions. On all of them he assumed the representative attitude of a friend to civil and religious liberty—an attitude which he has always consistently preserved. He has been no dark plotter for the overthrow of the monarchy, or the subversion of churches as religious organisations. His principles, alike in those early stages of his career which we have just traced as in his later years, are very simple. Briefly stated, they are—political enfranchisement for the masses, liberty and the full rights of citizenship for the individual, perfect freedom of commercial intercourse between this and all other nations, and the severance of religion from the bonds of the State.

## CHAPTER XI.

*RUSSIA AND THE CRIMEAN WAR.*

Origin of the Crimean War.—The Holy Places.—Russia, Turkey, and the Christian Protectorate.—Declaration of War by Turkey.—Mr. Bright on British Interests and the Integrity of Turkey.—War Fever in England.—Sir Charles Napier and the Peace Society.—Powerful Speech by Mr. Bright.—Mr. Kinglake on the attitude of Cobden and Bright.—Deputation from the Peace Society to the Czar.—Treaty of Alliance between England, France, and Turkey.—Mr. Bright on Sir C. Napier and the English Cabinet.—Flippancy of Lord Palmerston.—Declaration of Hostilities against Russia—Debate in the House of Commons.—Elaborate Speech by Mr. Bright.—University Reform, Church Rates, &c.—The Manchester Patriotic Fund Meeting.—Letter from Mr. Bright.—The Law of Vattel.—The Vienna Note.—The Policy of the English Government.—Effects of Mr. Bright's Letter.—Meetings at Manchester.—War Debates in the House of Commons.—Gross Mismanagement of the War.—Mr. Bright condemns the War with singular eloquence and power.—Memorable Scene during his Speech.



ENGLAND, in the language of the Earl of Clarendon, found herself 'drifting into war' at the close of the year 1853. The attitude which Mr. Bright assumed in the great Russo-Turkish conflict rendered him for a time very unpopular with a large body of his countrymen, and as his speeches on the Crimean War are in some respects amongst the most important he ever delivered, before dealing with these addresses, we shall briefly describe the events of this momentous period.

Russia had long been credited with designs upon Turkey, and as far back as the year 1844 the Czar had conversed with the Duke of Wellington and Lord Aberdeen on the probable dissolution of the Turkish Empire. The Emperor Nicholas embodied his views in a Memorandum, which was transmitted to London, but kept secret for ten years—that is, till 1854—by the British Cabinet. In 1853, a

dispute arose between the Greek and Latin Churches as to the exclusive possession of the Holy Places; and in this dispute Russia and France took opposite sides. On the recommendation of the Porte, a Mixed Commission was formed, which decided in favour of the Greeks, and a firman was promulgated to this effect. France was dissatisfied with this, and the quarrel soon assumed a wider scope. The Russians demanded that a convention should be signed by the Sultan, granting to the Czar such a protectorate over the Greek Christians in Turkey as the Sultan considered inimical to his own authority. A Conference of representatives of England, France, Austria, and Prussia met at Vienna on the 31st of July, and agreed to a Note. This was accepted by the Czar, but the Sultan subsequently required modifications which Russia rejected. On the 14th of September, two English and two French ships entered the Dardanelles, and on the 5th of October the Sultan declared war against Russia.

There was a strong feeling in England against the Northern Power; and on the very day after the declaration of war by Turkey, a meeting was held at the Manchester Athenæum for the purpose of denouncing the conduct of Russia, and of encouraging the British Government to protect British interests and to preserve the integrity of Turkey. Mr. Bright, in reply to an invitation to attend this meeting, wrote: 'I cannot conceive anything more unwise than to endeavour to excite public opinion to drive the Government into war with Russia in defence of Turkey. If such a war should be undertaken, I believe our children and posterity will judge us precisely as we now judge those who involved this country in war with the American colonies and with France, with this difference only, that we shall be held to be so much more guilty, inasmuch as having had the blunders and crimes of our forefathers to warn us and to guide us, we have wilfully shut our eyes to the lesson which their unfortunate policy has left us. Manchester, and the two millions of people in this district, I hope and believe regard those men as their worst enemies, who, by any act at this moment, shall weaken the efforts of Lord Aberdeen to preserve the peace of Europe. If men would let their reason guide them rather than their feelings, I am sure the

pressure of public influence would be for peace, and not for war. War will not save Turkey if peace cannot save her; but war will brutalise our people, increase our taxes, destroy our industry, and postpone the promised Parliamentary Reform, it may be, for many years.'

But the appeal was made in vain. The war fever had already severely attacked the great bulk of the population. Admiral Sir Charles Napier, speaking at a meeting on the 8th, held at the London Tavern, said he saw there was to be a Peace Conference at Edinburgh on the 13th, 'and Mr. Bright and all the peaceable men were to be there. He was a peaceable man, and he was going too.' The Conference met on the 12th in due course. Eleven members of Parliament were present, including Messrs. Cobden, Bright, Miall, Hadfield, Cowan, and Heyworth; and amongst others who attended were the Rev. Dr. Guthrie, Dr. John Brown, Mr. Joseph Sturge, and Mr. Elihu Burritt. Mr. Cobden delivered a powerful speech; but the chief interest centred in the second day's proceedings, when it was known that Sir Charles Napier would attend, and fulfil his threat of bearding the Peace Society on its own ground. The gallant Admiral combated the notion that naval and military men were always for war and large establishments. Lord Nelson was not fond of bloodshed or war, and the Duke of Wellington was always a peace man,—after the war was over,' he added, amid loud laughter. Sir Charles went on to say that he was just as anxious for peace as his hon. friend Mr. Cobden; but the plan propounded by the latter was not the way to preserve peace. The views of the Peace Society were perfectly right, 'if you can carry them into execution.' The speaker defended such an army and navy for England as would be sufficient for her protection, showed the great power which Russia possessed, and concluded by expressing his opinion that if France and England did not come forward hand in hand, and the other nations of Europe, to prevent the hostilities between Russia and Turkey, no man would see the last of that war. He was as fond of peace as any one could be, but he was not one of those who would support non-resisting opinions.

Mr. Bright followed. Having shown the groundlessness of



previous alarms, he went on to say that the right time to oppose the errors and prejudices of the people never comes in the eyes of those writers in the public press who pander to these prejudices. 'They say, We must not do so and so; we shall embarrass the Government. But rumour says the Government has been pretty well embarrassed already. They say that we shall complicate the question if we interfere; but it cannot well be more complicated than it is, for hardly anybody but the peace men can tell how to unravel it. Now, what is it that we really want here? We wish to protest against the maintenance of great armaments in time of peace; we wish to protest against the spirit which is not only willing for war, but eager for war; and we wish to protest, with all the emphasis of which we are capable, against the mischievous policy pursued so long by this country, of interfering with the internal affairs of other countries, and thereby leading to disputes, and often to disastrous wars.' Admiral Napier had said that his friend Mr. Cobden had persuaded a feeble Government to reduce the armaments of this country to nothing. What was 'nothing' in the Admiral's estimation? Fifteen millions a year! The hon. gentleman next observed that we had kept up great expenditure on fallacious grounds, and he objected to these armaments as provoking a war spirit. 'From the maintenance of great fleets and armies, there grows up an *esprit de corps*—there grows a passion for these things, a powerful opinion in their favour, that smothers the immorality of the whole thing, and leads the people to tolerate, under those excited feelings, that which, under feelings of greater temperance and moderation, they would know was hostile to their country, as it is opposed to everything which we recognise as the spirit of the Christian religion.'

Further, said Mr. Bright, they (the members of the Peace Society) were against intervention. Our interventions hitherto—and he cited the cases of Spain, Portugal, and Syria—had brought us nothing. As to its being our duty to interfere with a despotic power like Russia, he asked, 'If it were not contrary to international law and to the law of Europe for a Russian army to invade Hungary, to suppress there a struggle which called for, and obtained too, the

sympathy of every man in favour of freedom in every part of the world,—I say, how can it be contrary to international law and the law of Europe for Russia to threaten the Sultan of Turkey, and to endeavour to annex Turkey to the Russian Empire? He wanted our policy to be consistent. As to Russia securing Constantinople and getting to India, these were very remote contingencies. Sufficient reasons had not been advanced for England's going to war, and entering on what perhaps might be a long, ruinous, and sanguinary struggle with a powerful empire like Russia.

In a very impressive passage Mr. Bright asked his hearers what war was, expressing his belief that half the people who talked about it had not the slightest idea what it involved:—

‘In a short sentence it may be summed up to be the combination and concentration of all the horrors, atrocities, crimes, and sufferings of which human nature on this globe is capable. But what is even a rumour of war? Is there anybody here who has anything in the funds, or who is the owner of any railway stock, or anybody who has a large stock of raw material or manufactured goods? The funds have recently gone down ten per cent. I do not say that the fall is all on account of this danger of war, but a great proportion of it undoubtedly is. A fall of ten per cent. in the funds is nearly £80,000,000 sterling of value, and railway stock having gone down twenty per cent. makes a difference of £60,000,000 in the value of the railway property of this country. Add the two—£140,000,000—and take the diminished prosperity and value of manufactures of all kinds during the last few months, and you will understate the actual loss to the country now if you put it down as £200,000,000 sterling. But that is merely a rumour of war. That is war a long way off—the small cloud, no bigger than a man's hand; what will it be if it comes nearer and becomes a fact? And surely sane men ought to consider whether the case is a good one, the ground fair, the necessity clear, before they drag a nation of nearly 30,000,000 of people into a long and bloody struggle, for a decrepit and tottering empire, which all the nations in Europe cannot long sustain.’

War, too, continued the speaker, wore a very different aspect from what it formerly did. It would now wither up the sources of the prosperity enjoyed by the middle and working classes of the country. War in 1853 would be infinitely more perilous and destructive to the country than it had ever yet been at any former period in its history. After indicating other evils, Mr. Bright said that if we went into war we should have more banners to decorate our cathedrals and churches. Englishmen would fight as well as

they ever did, and there was ample power to back them, if the country could be but sufficiently excited and deluded. We might raise up great generals—another Wellington and another Nelson too—for the country could grow men capable for every enterprise. But what would become of themselves, their country, and their children? When he thought of the tremendous perils into which unthinking men were willing to drag or to hurry the country, he was amazed how they could trifle with interests so vast, and consequences so much beyond their calculation.

With this peroration, which deeply moved the audience—ensuring first their complete silence and then their rapturous plaudits—Mr. Bright concluded :—

‘You profess to be a Christian nation. You make it your boast even—though boasting is somewhat out of place in such questions—you make it your boast that you are a Protestant people, and that you draw your rule of doctrine and practice, as from a well pure and undefiled, from the living oracles of God, and from the direct revelation of the Omnipotent. You have even conceived the magnificent project of illuminating the whole earth, even to its remotest and darkest recesses, by the dissemination of the volume of the New Testament, in whose every page are written for ever the words of peace. Within the limits of this island alone, on every Sabbath, twenty thousand—yes, far more than twenty thousand temples are thrown open, in which devout men and women assemble that they may worship Him who is the “Prince of Peace.” Is this a reality? or is your Christianity a romance? Is your profession a dream? No, I am sure that your Christianity is not a romance, and I am equally sure that your profession is not a dream. It is because I believe this that I appeal to you with confidence, and that I have hope and faith in the future. I believe that we shall see, and at no very distant time, sound economic principles spreading much more widely amongst the people; a sense of justice growing up in a soil which hitherto has been deemed unfruitful; and, which will be better than all, the churches of the United Kingdom—the churches of Britain—awaking, as it were, from their slumbers, and girding up their loins to more glorious work, when they shall not only accept and believe in the prophecy, but labour earnestly for its fulfilment, that there shall come a time—a blessed time—a time which shall last for ever—when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”’

Fear of Russia was the key-note of British policy in the Crimean War, though much was said also of the necessity for maintaining the ‘balance of power’ in Europe. Mr. Cobden, Mr. Bright, and their friends were well aware that they were exposing themselves to unpopularity in opposing the war clamour. By many they were

stigmatised as unpatriotic, though why they should not be supposed to have the interests of that country in which they were bound up at heart as much as any one else does not appear. To regard them as mistaken was permissible, but we venture to say there is not one now who would repeat at this day the charge that they were traitors to their country in 1854. Mr. Kinglake represents the general belief when he says that Cobden and Bright were honestly devoted to the cause of peace. They honestly believed that the impending war with Russia was a needless one. There was no stain upon their names. Considering the cost of the Crimean War to England, in blood and treasure, and glancing over the sequence of events since 1854, we may well ask now whether the small minority of that period were not substantially in the right.

Mr. Kinglake curiously argues that a man cannot carry weight as the opponent of any particular war if he is one who is known to be against almost all wars. 'He who altogether abjures the juice of the grape, cannot usefully criticise the vintage of any particular year; and a man who is the steady adversary of wars in general, upon broad and paramount grounds, will never be regarded as a sound judge of the question whether any particular war is wicked or righteous, nor whether it is foolish or wise.' This will seem to most people very fallacious reasoning, and certainly it is not applicable in the case of Mr. Bright, for we do not find in the course of his career a single instance where he has opposed a war without advancing detailed and specific grounds against it *per se*, as well as opposing it on those broad and paramount grounds referred to by Mr. Kinglake. Besides, Mr. Kinglake and other defenders of the Crimean War lean too much to the conclusion that a majority must be in the right. Without attempting to pronounce on so great a matter as the Crimean War, it is possible to conceive the case of a minority of one against the world, in which the minority was right.

We resume our narrative with the declaration of war against Turkey by Russia on the 1st of November 1853. The four Powers still endeavoured to secure peace by negotiations, but early in the following January the Vienna Conferences closed.

On the 10th of February 1854, a deputation from the Peace

Society—consisting of Mr. Henry Pease, of Darlington, Mr. Joseph Sturge, of Birmingham, and Mr. Robert Charlton, of Bristol—had an interview with the Czar at St. Petersburg, their object being to prevent the impending war. The Emperor not only received them kindly, and introduced them to the Empress, but pressed them to prolong their stay and visit Moscow. Their efforts on behalf of peace proved unavailing, although the Czar declared his anxiety to maintain cordial relations between England and Russia.

A few days later, namely, on the 27th of February, England and France sent an ultimatum to St. Petersburg. The Czar returned no answer to this, whereupon a treaty of alliance was entered into between England, France, and Turkey. On the 11th of March 1854, the Baltic fleet sailed under Sir C. Napier.

Before the gallant Admiral left London, he was entertained at a banquet at the Reform Club, and the proceedings at this banquet led to a very exciting scene in the House of Commons. Sir Charles, in responding to the toast of his health, had said, 'I suppose we are very nearly at war, and probably, when I get into the Baltic, I'll have an opportunity of declaring war.' Sir James Graham, First Lord of the Admiralty, was still more indiscreet in his language in reply to these remarks. 'My gallant friend,' he observed, 'says that when he goes into the Baltic he will declare war; I, as First Lord of the Admiralty, give him my free consent to do so.'

Mr. Bright brought these utterances under the attention of the House of Commons during a discussion which arose on the 13th of March. He began by contrasting the presence of three Cabinet Ministers at the Reform Club with the marked absence of Lord John Russell, and the Ministerial postponement of a proposed military dinner at the Mansion House; he also contrasted Lord Palmerston's former language about a French invasion with his present language about the 'good faith' of the Emperor Napoleon; compared Sir W. Molesworth's present position with his language, before taking office, against intervention; and commented unfavourably upon the utterances of Sir James Graham, the First Lord of the Admiralty. The hon. member said that Sir Charles Napier's statements respecting the impending war had been received at the

banquet with loud cheers and laughter, and cries of 'Bravo, Charley !' They had further been endorsed by Sir James Graham in the most indiscreet manner ; and he (Mr. Bright) wished to ask whether the language which the right hon. baronet had used, and the tone he had adopted, had the sanction of the Cabinet, or the authority of his Sovereign.

The following is a report of the closing passage of Mr. Bright's speech, and of the manner in which Lord Palmerston met the hon. member's inquiry :—

*Mr. Bright.* 'I must confess that I have read the whole of these proceedings with pain and with humiliation. Whether this war may be justifiable or not, is not the question ; but whatever sort of war it may be, it is an awful thing to any nation that engages in it. (Hear, hear.) If war be not itself always a crime, it is the inevitable parent of innumerable crimes. There are thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of lives depending on this question. (Hear, hear.) The fortune and happiness, it may be, of millions are depending upon it. You are sending out twenty-five thousand men to the other side of Europe. You are taking a man from each of twenty-five thousand British homes ; in each of those homes there is a British family filled at this moment with feelings of the deepest anxiety—fear, it may be, alternately with hope. We know that before the summer is over, perhaps even before it comes, we may have news from the swamps of the Danube—news of the indiscriminate slaughter of the battle-field—which may strike hundreds of people in this country dumb with agony and despair. I want to know, then, whether the jokes and stories of the noble lord the member for Tiverton were becoming at a time like this ? The question, I conceive, Sir, is one of the gravest that can be discussed by a country or a Legislature, or undertaken by a Government ; and the reckless levity that was displayed was, in my opinion, discreditable in the last degree to the great and responsible statesmen of a civilised and Christian nation.' (Loud cries of Hear, hear.)

*Viscount Palmerston.* 'Sir, if the hon. and reverend gentleman'—(laughter)——

*Mr. Cobden.* 'I rise to order. The noble lord has, I believe, made use of an epithet, in speaking of my hon. friend, that is not justified by the rules of this House. I trust I shall not misinterpret his meaning when I say that it was not intended to be personally offensive ; but I think I shall not be contradicted by a majority of this House when I say that it was flippant and undeserved.'

*Viscount Palmerston.* 'I will not quarrel, Sir, with the hon. member for the West Riding about words ; but as the hon. gentleman (Mr. Bright) has been pleased to advert to the circumstance of my being chairman at the dinner to which allusion has been made, and as he has been kind enough to express an opinion as to my conduct on that occasion, I deem it right to inform the hon. gentleman that any opinion he may entertain either of me personally, or of my conduct, private or political, is to me a matter of the most perfect indifference.'

There was more of a like character with this in Lord Palmerston's

reply. Whether it was that he was conscious that the proceedings at the banquet were incongruous we cannot tell, but certainly in his reply to Mr. Bright there was not the usual flow of his happy wit. He took refuge in inferior *badinage*, and the only answer he gave to the question respecting Sir James Graham, was to the effect that he did not think his Ministerial colleague had discredited himself by attending a dinner given by the Reform Club to a distinguished officer, one of its own members, before starting for foreign service. The subject dropped after some further brief speeches.

Mr. Trevelyan has an interesting passage upon this episode in his *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*: 'There was very little trace,' he observes, 'either of statesmanship or Christianity in Lord Palmerston's reply. He began by alluding to Mr. Bright as "the hon. and reverend gentleman." He was called to order for this gross violation of the ordinary courtesies of debate; but instead of taking advantage of the interruption to recover his temper and self-respect, he continued his remarks in a strain which, though it did not justify the interference of the Speaker, was most repugnant to the taste and feeling of his brother members. For the first and last time in his life, Macaulay had nothing to say in defence of his hero. "I went to the House on Monday," he writes; "but for any pleasure I got, I might as well have stayed away. I heard Bright say everything that I thought; and I heard Palmerston and Graham expose themselves lamentably. Palmerston's want of temper, judgment, and good breeding was almost incredible. He did himself more harm in three minutes than all his enemies and detractors throughout the world have been able to do him in twenty years. I came home quite dispirited."'

Towards the close of March, a Royal Message to Parliament formally announced that England had come to an open rupture with Russia, and that war was now actively to commence. The message announcing the declaration of hostilities was discussed in both Houses on the 31st. In the Lower, Lord John Russell moved the address to Her Majesty.

Mr. Bright, in a long speech, gave his reasons for opposing the war. He was anxious, he said, to clear himself from any portion of

the responsibility attaching to those who supported the Government policy. Mr. Disraeli had spoken of the war as 'a just and unnecessary war.' As to its justice, he (Mr. Bright) would not discuss that. Every war undertaken since the days of Nimrod had been declared to be just by those in favour of it; but he might at least question whether any war that was unnecessary could be deemed to be just. Nor would he discuss the question on the abstract principle of peace at any price. He would maintain that in deliberating on the question of war, it became them to show that the interests of the country were clearly involved; that the objects for which the war was undertaken were probable or at least possible of attainment; and that the end proposed to be accomplished was worth the cost and the sacrifices which they were about to incur. These were the principles, and no other, on which he should discuss the question. 'Now, it seems to me,' continued Mr. Bright, 'quite impossible to discuss this question without considering the actual condition of Turkey. The hon. member for Aylesbury (Mr. Layard) assumes that they who do not agree in the policy he advocates are necessarily hostile to the Turks, and have no sympathy for Turkey. I repudiate such an assumption altogether. I can feel for a country like that, if it be insulted or oppressed by a powerful neighbour; but all that sympathy may exist without my being able to convince myself that it is the duty of this country to enter into the serious obligation of a war in defence of the rights of that country. The noble lord the member for Tiverton is one of the very few men in this House, or out of it, who are bold enough to insist upon it that there is a growing strength in the Turkish Empire. If any one thing is more apparent than another, on the face of all the documents furnished to the House by the Government of which the noble lord is a member, it is this, that the Turkish Empire is falling, or has fallen, into a state of decay, and into anarchy so permanent as to have assumed a chronic character.' Constantinople was the seat of factions and intrigues. Russia, on the contrary, was a powerful country; it had, too, religious affinities with a majority of the population of European Turkey which made it absolutely impossible that its Government should not more or less interfere, or have a strong interest, in the



internal policy of the Ottoman Empire. Though himself opposed to intervention, yet if the House were Russian, they would be strongly in favour of such intervention as Russia had attempted.

If Russia made certain demands on Turkey in the outset, this country insisted that Turkey should not consent to them, and in proof of this Mr. Bright quoted from the despatches of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe. There was nothing in the demands of Russia which the Sultan ought to have refused, and would not have conceded, if he had not thought war, with England and France for his supporters, more advantageous to his interests. With regard to the Vienna Note, which nobody seemed to understand, what were they to think of those arbitrators or mediators—the four ambassadors at Vienna, and the Governments of France and England—who, after discussing the matter in three different cities, and at three distinct and different periods, and after agreeing that the proposition was one which Turkey could assent to without detriment to her honour and independence, immediately afterwards turned round, and declared that the note was one which Turkey could not be asked to accede to, and repudiated in the most formal and express manner that which they themselves had drawn up, and which, only a few days before, they had approved of as a combination of wisdom and diplomatic dexterity which had never been excelled? The Emperor of Russia had expressed his willingness to accept the Vienna Note—not in the sense that Count Nesselrode had placed upon it, and which, it was said, made it impossible for Turkey to accede to it—but in that which the ambassadors at Vienna declared to be its real meaning. It was therefore impossible from this fairly to doubt the sincerity of the desire for peace manifested by the Czar.

Mr. Bright said he had never thought that our own Government was not honestly anxious for peace, but they had left the issue of peace or war in the hands of the Turks. 'In my opinion, the original blunder was committed when the Turks were advised to resist and not to concede; and the second blunder was made when the Turks were supported in their rejection of the Vienna Note; for the moment the four Powers admitted that their recommenda-

tion was not necessarily to be accepted by the Porte, they put themselves entirely into the hands of the Turk, and might be dragged into any depth of confusion and war in which that respectable individual might wish to involve them.' There were three plans for dealing with this Turkish question, advocated by as many parties in this country. The first party were in favour of war in order to cripple Russia, and these would have gone to war long ago. The second party were in favour of the Government policy of war (though war delayed), a policy placing the responsibility for the war on other shoulders than our own. Then there was a third course which he (Mr. Bright) had all along recommended—viz., that war should have been avoided by the acceptance on the part of Turkey either of the last Note of Prince Menschikoff or of the Vienna Note; or, if Turkey would not consent to either, that then she should have been allowed to enter into the war alone, and England and France—supposing they had taken, and continued to take, the same view of the interests of Western Europe which they had hitherto taken—might have stood aloof until the time when there appeared some evident danger of the war being settled on terms destructive of the balance of power; and then they might have come in, and have insisted on a different settlement. He would either have allowed or compelled Turkey to yield, or would have insisted on her carrying on the war alone. If either the Vienna Note or that of Prince Menschikoff had been accepted, the Emperor of Russia never intended to march on Constantinople. Indeed, he had pledged himself in the most distinct manner to withdraw his troops at once from the Principalities, if the Vienna Note were accepted; and therefore in that case Turkey would have been delivered from the presence of the foe; peace would for a time have been secured to Europe; and the whole matter would have drifted on to its natural solution—which is, that the Mohammedan power in Europe should eventually succumb to the growing power of the Christian population of the Turkish territories.

Mr. Bright then dealt with the 'balance of power' argument, on which the whole question really turned. He quoted passages from Mr. Burke, Mr. Whitbread, Mr. Fox, and Lord Holland, proving

that they had never regarded the Turkish Empire as any part of the balance of power in Europe. When the United States waged war with Mexico, we never interfered on behalf of Mexico on this ground of maintaining the balance of power. Nor, happily, did England and France go to war over the seizure of Algiers. Further, on this ground Austria might complain of ourselves, for England, compared with Austria, was then three times as powerful as she was thirty or forty years before. If the phrase of the 'balance of power' were to be brought in on every occasion to stimulate this country to war, there was an end to all hope of permanent peace. The whole notion was a mischievous delusion which had come down to us from past times. Lord John Russell had pledged himself to the integrity and independence of Turkey, but nothing could be more destructive of this than his policy. At that moment there were no less than three foreign armies on Turkish soil; there were 100,000 Russian troops in Bulgaria; there were armies from England and France, approaching the Dardanelles, to entrench themselves on Turkish territory, and to return nobody knew when. All this could hardly contribute to the 'independence' of any country. There were, further, insurrections springing up in almost every Turkish province, and the whole country must shortly be in a distracted and demoralised state. It was not likely that the reforms called for in Turkey would be conceded.

The 'balance of power' theory had been entirely overthrown by the policy of the Government, and no one would argue that Turkey could come out of her present difficulties more able to cope with the power of Russia than she was before. But we were told, the hon. member further remarked, that we were undertaking to repress and to curb Russian aggression. These were catching words, and they had served to blind the eyes of multitudes wholly ignorant of the details of this question. 'You may make a treaty with Russia, but if Russia is still powerful and ambitious—as she certainly will be, and if Turkey is exhausted and enfeebled by the war—as she certainly will be, then I want to know what guarantee you have, the moment the resources of Russia have recovered from the utmost degree of humiliation and exhaustion to which you may succeed in reducing

her, that she will not again insist on terms with Turkey infinitely more perilous than those which Turkey has been urged to her ruin to refuse? It is a delusion to suppose you can dismember Russia—that you can blot her from the map of Europe—that you can take guarantees from her, as some seem to imagine, as easily as you take bail from an offender, who would otherwise go to prison for three months. England and France cannot do this with a stroke of the pen, and the sword will equally fail if the attempt be made.'

How were the interests of England involved in this question? He (Mr. Bright) had sympathy with all oppressed nationalities, but it was not his duty to make this country the knight-errant of the human race, and to take upon herself the protection of the thousand millions of human beings who had been permitted by the Creator of all things to people this planet. Coming to the cost of this war, and the effect upon the finances of the country, the speaker referred to the services already rendered by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gladstone). The country had set its seal to this—that his financial measures, in the remission and readjustment of taxation, were worthy of the approbation of the great body of the people. Now there was a great difference of opinion in the Cabinet on this Eastern question, and to no member of the Government could the existing state of things be more distressing than to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for it dashed from him the hopes he entertained that session after session, as trade extended and the public revenue increased, he would find himself the beneficent dispenser of blessings to the poor, and indeed to all classes of the people of this kingdom. Where was the surplus now? No man dared even to ask for it, or for any portion of it.'

Mr. Bright next alluded to the proposed abolition of the newspaper stamp—which could scarcely now be hoped for,—to the postponement of Reform, and to the disastrous effect which the war must have upon the trade of the country. The funds had already fallen in value to the amount of £120,000,000 sterling, and railway property was quoted at about £80,000,000 less than was the case a year ago. Then they must consider the terrible loss of life which must ensue from this war, which military authorities placed at

between 10,000 and 20,000 men. We were at present boasting of an alliance with France, but alliances were dangerous things, and by this boasted alliance with France we might find ourselves involved in great difficulties at some future period in these transactions. After studying the correspondence on this question, he was amazed at the course which the Government had pursued. This he said in no spirit of hostility to the Government, but they had committed a grievous, it might be a fatal error. Replying to the argument that the war was popular, and that it was foolish and eccentric to oppose it, Mr. Bright said he doubted if the war was very popular in the House, but if it were, what was more popular than the American war? Where was now the popularity of that disastrous and disgraceful war, and who was the man to defend it? Again, what war could be more popular than the French war? 'For myself,' said Mr. Bright, 'I do not trouble myself whether my conduct in Parliament is popular or not. I care only that it shall be wise and just as regards the permanent interests of my country, and I despise from the bottom of my heart the man who speaks a word in favour of this war, or of any war which he believes might have been avoided, merely because the press and a portion of the people urge the Government to enter into it.' He concluded by sketching what England might have been but for her interference in European wars:—

'The past events of our history have taught me that the intervention of this country in European wars is not only unnecessary, but calamitous; that we have rarely come out of such intervention having succeeded in the objects we fought for; that a debt of £800,000,000 sterling has been incurred by the policy which the noble lord approves, apparently for no other reason than that it dates from the time of William III.; and that, not debt alone has been incurred, but that we have left Europe at least as much in chains as before a single effort was made by us to rescue her from tyranny. I believe if this country, seventy years ago, had adopted the principle of non-intervention in every case where her interests were not directly and obviously assailed, that she would have been saved from much of the pauperism and brutal crimes by which our Government and people have alike been disgraced. This country might have been a garden, every dwelling might have been of marble, and every person who treads its soil might have been sufficiently educated. We should indeed have had less of military glory. We might have had neither Trafalgar nor Waterloo; but we should have set the high example of a Christian nation, free in its institutions, courteous and just in its conduct towards all foreign states, and resting its policy on the unchangeable foundation of Christian morality.'

Mr. Bright thus relieved his conscience, in a masterly and elaborate speech, but one which fell upon unsympathetic ears. The Address was voted as a matter of course.

The Government introduced during this session several bills, having for their object the prevention of bribery. In consequence of the pressure occasioned by the war, however, these bills were withdrawn on the 29th of May. Mr. Disraeli, in a speech full of wit and sarcasm, made merry over the fortunes of a Government which had made so many sacrifices for the public good. Mr. Bright, on rising, referred to the lively encounter which had taken place between Mr. Disraeli and Lord John Russell, and said he thought the latter had not come off without some scars. Turning to the question before the House, the hon. member said it was impossible to disguise the fact that the elements of the Government were such that it could not act for the welfare of the country. As an ingenious gentleman had said, they would get on admirably if they only avoided politics. Mr. Gladstone had so far saved the Government by his measures, but it was clear that the noble lord who was by courtesy called the leader, did not lead the House, and that the House did not follow him. He was extremely sorry that the Government did not possess the confidence of the House of Commons, because many of their measures were wise and just. It was a dangerous doctrine to set up that because a Government had landed us in war, it must be supported at whatever cost, and the loss of other legislation, until the war was ended. After paying a high compliment to the Earl of Aberdeen, Mr. Bright said he must still complain that we were engaged in a war for objects on which the Government had never yet condescended to enlighten the House; and as to the terms on which peace was to be procured, no one had any idea. Seeing the mischievous policy of the noble lord and his colleagues, he saw no ground for the noble lord calling for the confidence of the House, or for the continued support and approbation of the country.

We interrupt the thread of our narrative for a moment to refer to several questions of importance, not connected with the war, which arose in the session of 1854, and upon which Mr. Bright

addressed the House. The first of these was the Oxford University Reform Bill, introduced by Lord John Russell for the purpose of making further provision for the good government and extension of the University of Oxford, and the colleges therein. Mr. Bright spoke with great energy against the measure, supporting Mr. Heywood's motion to refer it to a select committee. He said it seemed to him that two principles had been at work in the formation of this bill, which was the result of a compromise between them, and he thought it was a question whether a Cabinet that could not agree on the fundamental principles of a measure should bring it forward. He felt a repugnance to assist in the tinkering amendment of an institution from which, though national, he as a Dissenter was excluded, and with which he had no sympathy. The postponement of the bill for a year would be cheaply purchased by the expulsion from it of that compromising spirit by which the Government bills were now so often emasculated. 'You do not exclude us,' said Mr. Bright, referring to the great Dissenting bodies of the country, 'when you send your taxgatherers round, or when you ask for the performance of the duties of citizenship; you do not exclude us from the statistical tables of your population, of your industry, of your wealth, of your renown. You take all your population in, and say, "This is a great, an united people, which are called the British people;" and you declare in your speeches and perorations that you are proud to rule over such a nation. But when you come to the question of education in the institutions which you call national Universities, then you, the House of Commons, and you, the Liberal-Conservative, or the Conservative and Liberal Administration—you who occupy the offices from which you ignominiously ejected your predecessors—you who say there are no men to come after you—you ask us to accept a bill of this pusillanimous and tinkering character, insulting, as I have already described it, to one-half the population of the country.'

Once more Mr. Bright was in advance of his time, and his forcible plea for justice was ineffectual. University restrictions remained, and the Government measure, after protracted debates, passed both Houses and became law.

On the subject of the repeal of the Stamp Duty on newspapers and periodicals, Mr. Bright again advanced cogent arguments this session on behalf of the proposed abolition, showing how the spread of knowledge and education was seriously retarded by the operation of the law. He also supported Mr. Berkeley's motion on the Ballot, which was defeated by a narrow majority. Whatever difference of opinion there might be with regard to bribery, he affirmed that intimidation prevailed at almost all the contested elections in the United Kingdom. Two hundred members of the House were already pledged to the Ballot, and he hoped that all constituencies would soon make this a test question. Lord Palmerston did not think the evils of the existing system very great, and yet at almost every contested election scenes took place which were not only degrading to the country, but to human nature itself. He believed that so great was this evil, that it very much warped all their efforts, whether by education or by religious influence, to improve the standard of morality, patriotism, and honourable feeling amongst the people. Moreover, no harm would arise from the experiment of the Ballot, while a candidate who could not then get a vote by intimidation or threats, might get one by kindness, argument, and persuasion. He did not see why this should be a party question. If by so doing he gave only to a few of the unfortunate slaves of will and power in this country liberty and freedom, he would vote for this measure. The House had given the voter the trust, and, contrary to every principle of law, refused him the means absolutely necessary to fulfil that trust.

Two questions affecting the Nonconformists arose this session, one being that of Church Rates, and the other that of Nonconformist grants in Ireland. Mr. Bright warmly supported Sir W. Clay's bill for the abolition of Church-rates. After adducing many arguments against the continuance of the rates, he said the Dissenters did not come to that House as supplicants. They had been from the time of the Reformation a growing body in this country. The Puritans first, the Nonconformists afterwards, and now the Dissenters; and all the power of the Jameses, the Charleses, and the Georges had not been able to arrest the deepening, widening,



fertilising, and purifying stream of Nonconformity which existed in and blessed this country. During the reign of Charles II., 15,000 families were ruined, and 4000 or 5000 persons died in gaol, because they adhered to their religious convictions; and did they think it possible, by this law they were discussing, or by any law but the law of kindness and conviction in the human heart, to bring the Dissenters of the country back to the Established Church, or to prevent dissent from constantly swelling and increasing, while the members belonging to the Established Church were continually diminishing? He assumed that the House wished to get rid of the whole question of Church-rates, and that there was spirit enough in the Church to look after and attend to its own wants. It was to the interest of all parties, and to the greater interest of the country, to set this long-vexed question at rest for ever.

The bill was lost, however, but only by the small majority of 27, in a House composed of nearly 400 members.

The second question arose out of the Miscellaneous Estimates, when it was proposed to grant the sum of £38,745 to defray the expense of Nonconforming, Seceding, and Protestant Dissenting ministers in Ireland. Mr. Bright strongly opposed the grant, observing that it was neither a grant to members of an Established Church, nor was it in the nature of a charitable grant; and he could show that it was in its origin entirely political. This he proceeded to prove, tracing the history of the grant to the year 1690, when it was small in amount. But in the last fifty years—that is, from 1804—it had risen from £4000 to £38,000. The grant was unnecessary, for the Presbyterians of the north of Ireland were the most prosperous persons in the Irish nation belonging to the middle class. Mr. Bright contrasted their voluntary efforts unfavourably with those of the Dissenters of Wales and the members of the Presbyterian and Free Churches of Scotland. The prosperous men of Ulster, in matters of religion, in the payment of their own ministers, in subscribing for purposes of education and for missions, fell entirely and deplorably short of all other Dissenters and Nonconformists in the United Kingdom. The Presbyterians grasped at this money, and the grant was an inducement to the fabrication

of ministers and chapels, and an inducement for congregations to come year after year to that House for participation in the *Regium Donum*. As to a pecuniary claim for civilising Ulster, he should like to know who it was that civilised Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. It was the Nonconformists, who not only did not come to Parliament for a grant, but were in favour of the abolition of grants to religion. In the language of Dr. Candlish, these grants to the Dissenting bodies were nothing but 'hush-money' from the State. They were a disgrace to the bodies which accepted them, but doubly so to the Presbyterians of Ulster, who were quite rich enough to support their own ministers. The State subsidy which they now received sapped the life, the power, and the vitality of their Church.

Mr. (now Earl) Cairns undertook to reply to Mr. Bright, his chief argument being that the main question was a matter of contract—being part and parcel of the settlement of Ulster. The vote was carried by 149 to 62.

We return now to the subject of the Crimean war. In the midst of the decisive events happening in the East, for the battles of the Alma and Balaclava had just been fought, Mr. Bright received an invitation from Mr. Absalom Watkin to attend a meeting of the Manchester Patriotic Fund. Mr. Watkin stated in his communication that in his opinion the war was justified by the authority of Vattel. Mr. Bright replied by letter to this invitation on the 29th of October. Having observed that the meeting would be a most improper occasion for a discussion as to the justice of the war, he went on to say: 'With regard to the war itself, I am not surprised at the difference between your opinion and mine, if you decide a question of this nature by an appeal to Vattel. The "law of nations" is not my law, and at best it is a code full of confusion and contradictions, having its foundation on custom, and not on a higher morality; and on custom which has always been determined by the will of the strongest.' The American war was a just war according to the principles laid down by writers on 'the law of nations,' but no man in his senses would now say that the policy of George III. towards the American colonies was a wise policy, or that war a righteous

war. So too with regard to the French war. He would not submit his judgment on such matters to that of Vattel. Two independent Governments had a dispute, and we thrust ourselves into the quarrel. We had not been attacked—not even insulted in any way. But for the English Minister at Constantinople and the Cabinet at home, the dispute would have settled itself, and the last Note of Prince Menschikoff would have been accepted. While he did not defend the act of Russia in crossing the Pruth and occupying the Principalities, he thought it likely it could be well defended out of Vattel, and it was at least as justifiable as the menacing attitude of Lord John Russell and Lord Palmerston towards Greece, in 1850, in regard to the Don Pacifico case.

But the passage of the Pruth, continued Mr. Bright, was declared by England, France, and Turkey not to be a *casus belli*, and the celebrated Vienna Note was now drawn up. Our Government 'agreed to the Vienna Note; not fewer than five members of this Cabinet have filled the office of Foreign Secretary, and therefore may be supposed capable of comprehending its meaning: it was a note drawn up by the friends of Turkey, and by arbitrators self-constituted on behalf of Turkey; they urged its acceptance on the Russian Government, and the Russian Government accepted it; there was then a dispute about its precise meaning, and Russia agreed, and even proposed, that the arbitrators at Vienna should amend it, by explaining it, and limiting its meaning, so that no question of its intention should henceforth exist. But the Turks having rejected it, our Government turned round, and declared the Vienna Note, their own note, entirely inadmissible, and defended the conduct of the Turks in having rejected it. The Turks declared war, against the advice of the English and French Governments—so, at least, it appears from the Blue Books; but the moment war was declared by Turkey, our Government openly applauded it. England, then, was committed to the war. She had promised armed assistance to Turkey—a country without government, and whose administration was at the mercy of contending factions; and, incapable of fixing a policy for herself, she allowed herself to be dragged on by the current of events at Constantinople. She "drifted," as Lord Clarendon said,

exactly describing his own position, into the war, apparently without rudder and without compass.'

The writer maintained that the whole policy of the English Government in this matter was marked with an imbecility perhaps without example. There were evidences that one section of the Cabinet had always been for war, and he must point out the disgraceful feebleness of the Ministry if he was to absolve them from the guilt of having sought occasion for war. When the Vienna Note was accepted by Russia, the Turks should have been prevented from going to war, or should have been allowed to go to war at their own risk. 'My doctrine,' wrote Mr. Bright, 'would have been non-intervention in this case. The danger of the Russian power was a phantom; the necessity of permanently upholding the Mahometan rule in Europe is an absurdity. Our love for civilisation, when we subject the Greeks and Christians to the Turks, is a sham; and our sacrifices for freedom, when working out the behests of the Emperor of the French and coaxing Austria to help us, is a pitiful imposture. The evils of non-intervention were remote and vague, and could neither be weighed nor described in any accurate terms. The good we can judge something of already, by estimating the cost of a contrary policy.'

The writer showed this cost to be, war threatening to involve every country in Europe, a vast expenditure, disturbance of trade throughout the world, high prices of food, and an enormous loss of human life; and he thus concluded his remarkable letter:—

'When the time comes for the "inquisition for blood," who shall answer for these things? You have read the tidings from the Crimea; you have, perhaps, shuddered at the slaughter; you remember the terrific picture—I speak not of the battle, and the charge, and the tumultuous excitement of the conflict, but of the field after the battle—Russians, in their frenzy or their terror, shooting Englishmen who would have offered them water to quench their agony of thirst; Englishmen, in crowds, rifling the pockets of the men they had slain or wounded, taking their few shillings or roubles, and discovering among the plunder of the stiffening corpses images of the "Virgin and the Child." You have read this, and your imagination has followed the fearful details. This is war,—every crime which human nature can commit or imagine, every horror it can perpetrate or suffer; and this it is which our Christian Government recklessly plunges into, and which so many of our countrymen at this moment think it patriotic to applaud! You must excuse me if I cannot go with you.

I will have no part in this terrible crime. My hands shall be unstained with the blood which is being shed. The necessity of maintaining themselves in office may influence an Administration ; delusions may mislead a people ; Vattel may afford you a law and a defence ; but no respect for men who form a Government, no regard I have for "going with the stream," and no fear of being deemed wanting in patriotism, shall influence me in favour of a policy which, in my conscience, I believe to be as criminal before God as it is destructive of the true interest of my country.'

This letter caused quite a ferment of indignation amongst the war party, which was further enhanced when it was published in the *St. Petersburg Journal*, and all the leading continental newspapers. Mr. Bright had fortified his letter by notes and extracts from blue-books, &c., supporting his positions, but his opponents did not concern themselves with answering his arguments. War had come, and it was deemed patriotic to support a war policy. In the month of December the Mayor of Manchester called a public meeting in the Town Hall, in order that the citizens might have an opportunity of discussing Mr. Bright's letter. A requisition had been presented to the Mayor, embodying 613 signatures, but it appeared on examination that out of the signatories only fifty had voted for Mr. Bright at the last election. The scene at the meeting was almost indescribable. Mr. Bright, however, was loudly cheered when he appeared and advanced towards the platform. Mr. W. R. Wood moved the following resolution : ' That this meeting, having learned that the letter of Mr. John Bright on the war has been translated and circulated in Russia, desires to declare that the citizens of Manchester do not concur in the opinions expressed by Mr. Bright, but, on the contrary, they are convinced that the war is just and necessary, and do earnestly desire that it may be carried on with the utmost vigour until it shall be terminated by an honourable peace.' Mr. Absalom Watkin seconded the motion. Mr. Alderman W. B. Watkins moved an amendment, to the effect that Mr. Bright exercised an undoubted right in expressing his opinion on the war ; and that although this opinion differed from that held by many of his constituents, it was tyrannical and unjust to censure him for the manly avowal of his sentiments on so important a subject. Mr. Alex. Henry seconded the amendment. Mr. Bright rose to speak, but the mingled cheers and groans prevented him from being heard.

Being compelled at length to address himself to the reporters, he spoke for a few minutes defending his letter, and added, 'My object is to avert from England and from Europe this great calamity of war; and whatever may be the result to me personally, I shall never shrink from taking the course which I have taken up to this hour.'

The Mayor several times called for a show of hands from the meeting, but on each occasion the numbers were so evenly balanced that he was unable to decide the matter, and consequently dissolved the meeting. Mr. Bright, on the same evening, addressed his friends at Newall's Buildings on the question of the war. He asked whether, after this struggle, liberty in Europe, reform, or anything good in the politics of this country, would be in a better position than it was before the war commenced. The verdict of events would ultimately be given in their favour. The meeting unanimously passed a vote of thanks to Mr. Bright for the manliness with which he had avowed his unflinching attachment to the principles which had hitherto guided his conduct, and which would continue to guide him.

By way of showing, however, the feverish heat to which the passions of a large proportion of the people had risen, it may be mentioned that Mr. Bright was burnt in effigy by a portion of the population at New Cross Ward. Whether we agree or disagree with his opinions on the Crimean war, considering the temper of the time, there was something heroic in the way in which this political Ajax defied the lightning.

On the 12th of December 1854, Parliament again assembled, and was opened by the Queen in person. War debates immediately ensued, and Ministers were severely attacked for the gross mismanagement in the administrative departments. Incapacity and stupidity reigned in the camp before Sebastopol, in the harbours of Balaclava, and in the hospitals of Scutari. In order to provide for further emergencies, the Duke of Newcastle introduced the Foreign Enlistment Bill, the object of which was to raise a force of 15,000 foreigners, to be drilled in this country. The number was afterwards reduced to 10,000. The bill was opposed by many members of both Houses as dangerous in principle and policy, but in the end

it was successfully carried through both Lords and Commons. Lord John Russell moved the third reading in the House of Commons on the 22d, and Mr. Bright was the last member who spoke before the division.

His speech on this occasion was not a very lengthy one, but it was amongst the most striking and powerful addresses which Mr. Bright has ever delivered. It bore evidences of being almost entirely impromptu, and this makes it the more remarkable. It sprang from the white heat of conviction, and the flame-tipped words with which it closed touched the spirit of every man in that large assembly.

Mr. Bright began by correcting an error into which Lord John Russell had fallen with regard to Mr. Cobden's speech. The latter had not charged the Government with making war in something of a propagandist spirit in favour of nationalities throughout the Continent, but he had said that that portion of the population which clamoured for war, and upon whose opinions the Government based their defence, were in favour of the setting up of nationalities. The noble lord had also acted most disingenuously with regard to a phrase of Lord Palmerston's. The latter, referring to the Mahometan population of Turkey, had affirmed that they had improved within the last twenty years more than any other nation in Europe; but now his noble colleague had turned the question to the condition of the Christian population. 'The real question was, as every hon. gentleman knows,' said Mr. Bright, 'What was the condition of the Mahometan? and there is not a gentleman in this House who is not aware that the Mahometan portion of the population of the Turkish Empire is in a decaying and dying condition, and that the two great empires which have undertaken to set it on its legs again will find it about the most difficult task in which they ever were engaged.' He supported this statement by extracts from letters, showing the bad opinion entertained of the Turks by our own officers. As to their commerce, industry, and revenue, nothing could be in a worse condition. The Turk could not borrow money in the London market at less than eight or nine per cent., and yet Russian funds were very little lower than those of the London and North-Western

Railway, although three great empires were already in arms against Russia. After showing that Russia might have gone to war with this country in the Don Pacifico case, if she had been so minded, but refrained from doing so, Mr. Bright referred to the position of Austria in the present conflict. He was prepared to prove, he said, that from the beginning of this dispute there was not a single thing which Austria wished to do in the course of the negotiations, or even which France wished to do, that the Government of the noble lord did not systematically refuse its assent to, and the Ministry were alone responsible for the failure in every particular point which took place in the negotiations. It was through the interference of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe—supported by the English Cabinet—that the rejection of the Menschikoff Note was secured. At a later period, also, when the last propositions were drawn up by Counts Buol and Nesselrode, although Austria and Prussia were in favour of those propositions, and Lord Westmoreland himself said they might be received, the Earl of Clarendon wrote that our Government would not, upon any consideration, have anything further to do with the Vienna Note. ‘The rejection, first, of the amended Menschikoff Note, and then of the Olmütz Note, was a policy adopted solely by the Government of this country, and only concurred in, but not recommended, by the French Government and the other Governments of Europe. Whether this policy was right or wrong, there can be no doubt of the fact; and I am prepared to stake my reputation for accuracy and for a knowledge of the English language on this interpretation of the documents which have been laid before us. That being so, on what pretence could we expect that Austria should go to war in company with us for objects far beyond what she thought satisfactory at the beginning? or why should we ask the Emperor of the French to go to war for objects which he did not contemplate, and to insist on conditions which, in the month of September of last year, he thought wholly unnecessary?’

Mr. Bright next demonstrated, from a despatch by M. Drouyn de Lhuys, the French Foreign Minister, that the French Government had urged Russia to accept the Vienna Note, on the express ground



that its general sense differed in nothing from the sense of the original propositions of Prince Menschikoff. Now, as the noble lord had said over and over again that the Government of England concurred in all the steps taken by that of France, could there be dissimulation more extraordinary, guilt more conclusive, than that this Government should act as it did, after it had recommended the Emperor of Russia to accept the Vienna Note? He maintained that we were making war against the Government which accepted our own terms of peace. 'I state this now only for the purpose of urging upon the House and upon the Government that you are bound at least, after making war for many months, to exact no further terms from the State with which you are at war than such as will give that security which at first you believed to be necessary; and that if you carry on a war for vengeance—if you carry on a war for conquest—if you carry on a war for purposes of Government at home, as many wars have been carried on in past times, I say you will be guilty of a heinous crime, alike in the eyes of God and of man.'

The hon. member rebuked Lord John Russell for the trifling charges which he was constantly bringing against the Russian Government, and animadverted upon the Cabinet generally for being dispersed in various parts of the country when calamities were falling upon the British army. 'The noble Lord President (Lord John Russell) was making a small speech on a great subject somewhere in Cumberland. At Bedford he descanted on the fate of empires, forgetting that there was nothing so likely to destroy an empire as unnecessary wars. At Bristol he was advocating a new History of England, which, if impartially written, I know not how the noble lord's policy for the last few months will show to posterity. The noble lord the member for Tiverton (Lord Palmerston) undertook a more difficult task—a labour left unaccomplished by Voltaire; and when he addressed the Hampshire peasantry, in one short sentence he overturned the New Testament and destroyed the foundations of the Christian religion.' From this sarcastic picture, Mr. Bright went on to speak of the losses which the war had already occasioned. 'We all know what we have lost in this House. Here,

sitting near me, very often sat the member for Frome (Colonel Boyle). I met him a short time before he went out, at Mr. Westerton's, the bookseller, near Hyde Park Corner. I asked him whether he was going out. He answered, he was afraid he was; not afraid in the sense of personal fear—he knew not that; but he said, with a look and a tone I shall never forget, “It is no light matter for a man who has a wife and five little children.” The stormy Euxine is his grave; his wife is a widow, his children fatherless. On the other side of the House sat a member, with whom I was not acquainted, who has lost his life; and another, of whom I knew something (Colonel Blair). Who is there that does not recollect his frank, amiable, and manly countenance? I doubt whether there were any men on either side of the House who were more capable of fixing the goodwill and affection of those with whom they were associated. Well, but the place that knew them shall know them no more for ever.’ These were only two out of many cases which could be specified. Sorrow was spread over the whole country. He was in the House of Lords when the vote of thanks was moved. In the gallery were many ladies, three-fourths of whom were dressed in the deepest mourning. Was this nothing? No one supposed the Government wished to spread the pall of sorrow over the land, but they had a right to expect that they would at least discuss with becoming gravity a subject the appalling consequences of which might come home to individuals and to the nation.

Then came Mr. Bright's peroration, as follows:—

‘I recollect when Sir Robert Peel addressed the House on a dispute which threatened hostilities with the United States,—I recollect the gravity of his countenance, the solemnity of his tone, his whole demeanour showing that he felt in his soul the responsibility that rested on him. I have seen this, and I have seen the present Ministry. There was the buffoonery at the Reform Club. Was that becoming a matter of this grave nature? Has there been a solemnity of manner in the speeches heard in connection with this war, and have Ministers shown themselves statesmen and Christian men when speaking on a subject of this nature?’

‘It is very easy for the noble lord the member for Tiverton to rise and say that I am against war under all circumstances; and that if an enemy were to land on our shores, I should make a calculation as to whether it would be cheaper to take him in or keep him out, and that my opinion on this question is not to be considered either by Parliament or the country. I am not afraid of discussing the war with the noble lord

on his own principles. I understand the Blue Books as well as he ; and, leaving out all fantastic and visionary notions about what will become of us if something is not done to destroy or to cripple Russia, I say—and I say it with as much confidence as I ever said anything in my life—that the war cannot be justified out of these documents ; and that impartial history will teach this to posterity if we do not comprehend it now.

‘I am not, nor did I ever pretend to be, a statesman ; and that character is so tainted and so equivocal in our day, that I am not sure that a pure and honourable ambition would aspire to it. I have not enjoyed for thirty years, like these noble lords, the honours and emoluments of office. I have not set my sails to every passing breeze. I am a plain and simple citizen, sent here by one of the foremost constituencies of the empire, representing feebly, perhaps, but honestly, I dare aver, the opinions of very many, and the true interests of all those who have sent me here. Let it not be said that I am alone in my condemnation of this war, and of this incapable and guilty Administration. And even if I were alone, if mine were a solitary voice, raised amid the din of arms and the clamours of a venal press, I should have the consolation I have to-night—and which I trust will be mine to the last moment of my existence—the priceless consolation that no word of mine has tended to promote the squandering of my country’s treasure or the spilling of one single drop of my country’s blood.’

This speech was spoken under many disadvantages, but its effect was electrical. Mr. Bright was not only suffering from a severe cold, but he rose at one o’clock in the morning to address an audience holding in the main opposite views to his own. Several members interrupted him in his opening remarks, but these were at once silenced when the orator told them that although their functions were to cheer a Minister, they might at least have the decency not to interrupt a man giving honest expression to convictions of his own. The House was against him, but one who was present at the debate, says that Mr. Bright succeeded in securing ‘the most deferential attention, deepening every instant, until it reached a climax probably unparalleled in the recollection of any individual present, at least since the great affair between Canning and Brougham.’ This extraordinary philippic ‘was as superior to any mere Parliamentary vituperation as the subject itself—deep, solemn, momentous, and universal—was superior to the trivial and evanescent personalities that impart piquancy to individual exhibitors in the public arena. It was in vain that official callousness assumed an unconsciousness of its force. Before he had got half into the speech, every man on the Ministerial bench was in a state of acute-







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ness such as is not witnessed in a lifetime in the same place. Almost all of them had turned round in their seats, and kept gazing at their terrible assailant with fatuous immobility. Lord John Russell tried desperately to do the dignified, and covered his face with his hands, which he occasionally removed to attempt a spasmodic laugh; but when Mr. Bright came to talk of Colonel Boyle, and the widow and the five little orphans, the tears started to the eyes of many a brave man who heard him, and Lord John laughed no more.'

Lord Palmerston, at the outset of the speech, had pulled his hat over his eyes, folded his arms, and thrown himself back in his seat—a favourite attitude with him towards the end of a long sitting. But he was so completely roused by his antagonist, that he could not even feign an indifference which he did not feel. He tried to laugh when the speaker alluded to himself as upsetting the New Testament in a couple of sentences at an agricultural dinner. 'Short-lived, however, was the merriment. For presently Bright passed on to the "buffooneries at the Reform Club," and contrasted the general flippant levity of this Ministry, amidst the grief and mourning that then filled the land, with the grave decorum of Peel, even in the shadow of an anticipated war; and he laughed no more. As for Mr. Gladstone, he seemed much distressed. With the two exceptions, Disraeli and Graham, everybody was deeply affected. O'Connell's great test of his own speeches was the effect they produced on the reporters, and according to this test the speech of Mr. Bright was superlative, for the longest-lived of the short-lived gentry vowed that anything equal to it was quite out of his recollection.' . . . 'It was strictly a debating speech, and all the Coalition could not furnish a debater to reply to it. The consternation of Ministers as they hurriedly whispered when Bright sat down, the painful silence (far more significant than the most tumultuous applause) that pervaded the benches, as if there had been affirmed some dread calamity for which there was neither denial nor remedy—all told emphatically that Bright's point was *the* point.' It was beyond the power of any of the Ministers to make an effective reply to such a speech at the moment, and the House went to a division at once.




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Parliament, having accomplished the special objects for which it was called together, adjourned on the 23d of December, for the Christmas holidays. But the festivities of the English Christmas of that melancholy year were overshadowed by gloom. Thousands of weary hearts were turned to the far-distant Crimea, where beloved relatives had either already perished, the victims of a sanguinary war, or were now dying of neglect, the result of mismanagement so gross and so terrible as probably to be unparalleled in the annals of the British empire.

## CHAPTER XII.

*RUSSIA AND THE CRIMEAN WAR (concluded).*

The War at the beginning of 1855.—Condition of the English Army before Sebastopol.—Mr. Roebuck's Motion for a Select Committee.—Resignation of the Aberdeen Government.—A Palmerston Ministry formed.—Resignation of Mr. Gladstone, Sir J. Graham, and Mr. S. Herbert.—Ministerial Explanations.—Mr. Bright's eloquent appeal to Lord Palmerston to stay the War.—The struggle continues.—Mr. Bright defends the Peace Party.—Debates in the House of Commons on the prosecution of the War.—Important Speech by Mr. Bright.—Preponderance of Russia in the Black Sea.—Policy of the Government.—Attack on Lord John Russell.—Proposed vote of Censure upon Ministers.—Animated Speech by Mr. Bright.—His extra-Parliamentary utterances on the War Question.—Close of the Crimean Campaign.—General Remarks upon Mr. Bright's attitude on the War.

ARLIAMENT met on the 23d of January 1855, amidst much excitement and anxiety on the part of the nation. All were anxious to hear what was being done towards ameliorating the lot of our soldiers in the Crimea, and the whole conduct of the war was canvassed from various points of view. The general feeling, nevertheless, was still in favour of prosecuting the struggle with energy; and when Mr. Cobden addressed his constituents at Leeds, so strong was this sentiment that a resolution was carried against him. Neither the member for the West Riding, however, nor Mr. Bright, swerved from his opinions in consequence of such ebullitions of popular feeling. Speaking at Manchester at a *soirée* held in honour of himself and Mr. Gibson, Mr. Bright said, 'I behold the abyss into which multitudes would plunge the country. If I cannot save them from it, if they will not save themselves, at least I will warn them of their danger, and I will be no partner in

the deeds which I am convinced in my conscience will receive, as they well merit, the condemnation of posterity.' Alluding at the annual meeting of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce to the general commercial consequences of the war, he showed that pauperism was increasing at a frightful rate, and that trade itself was not flourishing. He illustrated this by a humorous comparison. 'Some men,' he said, 'because they have got Government contracts, fancy that trade is good, and that war is good for trade. Why, it is but carrying on the trade of Rochdale, or Dewsbury, or anywhere else, by the taxation of the country at large; and it is just like somebody described it, endeavouring to keep a dog alive by feeding him with his own tail.'

Meanwhile the scandalous condition of things in the Crimea was brought formally under the attention of the House of Commons. Mr. Roebuck moved for the appointment of a Select Committee 'to inquire into the condition of our army before Sebastopol, and into the conduct of those departments of the Government whose duty it has been to minister to the wants of the army.' Lord John Russell resigned office, because he could not see how this motion was to be resisted. Mr. Gladstone, in an eloquent speech, opposed the inquiry, because it would never take place as a real inquiry; or, if it did, because it would lead to nothing but confusion and disturbance, increased disasters, shame at home, and weakness abroad; because it could convey no consolation to those whom they sought to aid, while it would carry malignant joy to the hearts of the enemies of England. Ministers, however, found arrayed against them the large majority of 157 in a House of 453 members. The result of the division took every one by surprise, and instead of the usual cheering after the numbers were announced, a murmur of amazement was heard, culminating in loud and derisive laughter.

The Aberdeen Government resigned in consequence of this vote, and Lord John Russell and Lord Derby having respectively failed to form a Ministry, on the 6th of February Lord Palmerston succeeded in this difficult task. His Administration, however, was chiefly composed of the members of the old Cabinet. The new Premier tried to stave off the action of the Sebastopol Inquiry

Committee by promising a most stringent investigation into the conduct of the war. Sir James Graham, Mr. Gladstone, and Mr. Sidney Herbert shortly afterwards resigned office, and on the 23d of February explained in the House of Commons why the appointment of the Crimean Inquiry Committee led to their withdrawal from Lord Palmerston's Ministry.

During the debate which arose out of these Ministerial explanations, Mr. Bright delivered another brief but earnest and eloquent speech, and one which contains a passage that is perhaps now more famous, and more frequently referred to, than any other in his public and Parliamentary addresses.

He began by observing that he was one of a majority of the House who looked upon our present position as one of more than ordinary gravity, and he regretted the secession of the members who had withdrawn from the Government. But he would not take upon himself for a moment to condemn them, and he thought no one could have listened to the speech of Sir James Graham without being convinced that he and his retiring colleagues had been moved to the course they had taken by deliberate judgment, and upon honest grounds. He regretted their secession, however, because he did not like to see the Government of Lord Palmerston overthrown. For a month there had been a chaos in the region of administration; nothing could be more embarrassing and humiliating to this country, and the sentiment was not confined to these islands. We were at war with the greatest military power in the world; terms of peace had been agreed upon by this country and her allies; but there were writers in the public press, and members of Parliament, who had indulged dreams of vast political changes and conquests, and of a new map of Europe, as the objects of the war, and who urged the head of the Government to carry it on with vigour, and to prosecute enterprises which no Government could ever have seriously entertained. But he trusted that if our Government had offered terms of peace to Russia, we should not draw back and demand harder terms; and that if there should be a failure at Vienna, no man would impute to the rulers of this country that they had prolonged the war, and the infinite calamities of which it was the cause.

Mr. Bright next gave the reasons why he was anxious that the Government should not be overthrown. Whether in the right or in the wrong, there were no men in the country more truly responsible for England's position in the war than Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell. They would not shrink from the responsibility attaching to them, and they were now placed in a situation favourable to the termination of the existing troubles. Lord John Russell was at Vienna, and he (Mr. Bright) entertained a sanguine hope that the result of his mission would be to bring about a peace. The speaker then asked whether, if there were good grounds for believing that the negotiations would prove successful, our representative had power to enter into an armistice. Some members cried 'No! no!' to this question, whereupon Mr. Bright said, 'I know not, Sir, who it is that says "No, no," but I should like to see any man get up and say that the destruction of 200,000 human lives lost on all sides during the course of this unhappy conflict is not a sufficient sacrifice. You are not pretending to conquer territory—you are not pretending to hold fortified or unfortified towns; you have offered terms of peace which, as I understand them, I do not say are not moderate; and breathes there a man in this House or in this country whose appetite for blood is so insatiable that, even when terms of peace have been offered and accepted, he pines for that assault in which of Russian, Turk, French, and English, as sure as one man dies, 20,000 corpses will strew the streets of Sebastopol?'

After touching upon the disastrous influence which the war was having upon industry, and the condition of the country generally, the hon. member said there was at the same time growing up a bitter and angry feeling against the governing class. He deprecated political changes which were the result of passion, and not of deliberation and reason. He then alluded to the anxious feeling prevalent in the country as to the character of the news by the next mail from the East, and concluded with this now memorable passage, in which he made a strong and earnest appeal to Lord Palmerston:—

'The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one, as when the firstborn were slain of old,

to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two side-posts of our door, that he may spare and pass on; he takes his victims from the castle of the noble, the mansion of the wealthy, and the cottage of the poor and the lowly, and it is on behalf of all these classes that I make this solemn appeal.

‘I tell the noble lord, that if he be ready honestly and frankly to endeavour, by the negotiations about to be opened at Vienna, to put an end to this war, no word of mine, no vote of mine, will be given to shake his power for one single moment, or to change his position in this House. (Hear, hear.) I am sure that the noble lord is not inaccessible to appeals made to him from honest motives and with no unfriendly feeling. The noble lord has been for more than forty years a member of this House. Before I was born, he sat upon the Treasury bench, and he has spent his life in the service of his country. He is no longer young, and his life has extended almost to the term allotted to man. I would ask, I would entreat the noble lord to take a course which, when he looks back upon his whole political career—whatever he may therein find to be pleased with, whatever to regret—cannot but be a source of gratification to him. By adopting that course he would have the satisfaction of reflecting that, having obtained the object of his laudable ambition—having become the foremost subject of the Crown, the director of, it may be, the destinies of his country, and the presiding genius in her councils—he had achieved a still higher and nobler ambition: that he had returned the sword to the scabbard—that at his word torrents of blood had ceased to flow—that he had restored tranquillity to Europe, and saved this country from the indescribable calamities of war.’ (Loud cheers.)

The fine and beautiful, yet withal simple, simile with which Mr. Bright introduced his peroration, thrilled every listener. The effect produced by the words in which he invoked the Ministry to stay the war has been described as almost awful, yet overwhelmingly tender. The appeal was made by the orator with slow and tremulous voice, but with manner dignified and solemn, and a large number of members were visibly affected. The words in themselves are scarcely sufficient to account for this, but it is not language alone which makes true eloquence; time, occasion, fitness, sympathy, conviction—these have much to do with irresistibly enchaining an audience, and all these were in accord when Mr. Bright addressed the Premier in a strain never to be forgotten.

Lord Palmerston’s Cabinet was reconstructed, and the hopes of peace were momentarily strengthened by the death of the Emperor Nicholas on the 2d of March. His successor, Alexander, however, resolved upon prosecuting the war, the terms offered by Russia not having been accepted, and the allies against Russia were at this time reinforced by Sardinia. An attempt made to restore peace by a

proposed Conference of the Great Powers at Vienna failed, and the conflict in the Crimea continued.

Mr. Bright spoke out of Parliament on several occasions at this juncture on the war question. At Manchester, on the 6th of March, he said: 'When I find men going about our streets laughing at us, ridiculing us, telling us that we are not patriotic, I ask if there had been somebody sixty years ago to take up this principle of non-intervention, and to adopt and carry it out in our Government, should we not have escaped that long and odious war, with its expenditure of fifteen hundred millions of money,—should we not have been free from the barbarism and degradation which now run riot over our population,—and should we not have stood, not by force of arms, but by force of character and true greatness, infinitely more the arbiter of Europe than we ever can be by the greatest fleets, or by the most powerful and enormous armies?' At another great meeting, held at Manchester in the month of April, he confessed that he bowed his head with shame when he looked back upon the follies and crimes of which the English nation had to his mind been guilty. And notwithstanding this feeling of shame and disgust, there appeared to be nothing doing on the part of the nation to bring the Government to a better course, and to extricate the country from its difficulties. 'We have a Government of lords,' said Mr. Bright, 'of hereditary persons who kindly undertake to rule this great nation, charging us £5000 a year for each of these persons, and they consider it very often extremely impertinent if we make any comment upon the manner in which we are governed. Now, I am one of those who believe, notwithstanding that we have been foolish of late, that there is wisdom enough, manly strength enough, power of intellect enough, morality enough in this country, to afford us a very much better Government than we have seen of late. Possibly, when we take matters a little more into our own hands, we may find that the national affairs can be managed somewhat better than they have been of recent years.'

On the 24th of May, Mr. Disraeli submitted a motion to the House of Commons expressive of the dissatisfaction of the House at the ambiguous language and uncertain conduct of Her Majesty's

Government in reference to the great question of peace or war. An amendment was moved by Sir F. Baring, simply expressing regret that the Conferences at Vienna had not led to a termination of hostilities. Mr. Disraeli's motion was rejected by a majority of 319 to 219. The debate was continued over the Whitsuntide recess, on an amendment proposed by Mr. Lowe, declaring that the refusal of Russia to restrict the strength of her navy in the Black Sea had exhausted the means of suspending hostilities by negotiation. The three most important speeches during the debate were those of Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton, Mr. Bright, and Lord Palmerston.

Mr. Bright's address, delivered on the fifth night of the debate, was especially comprehensive, dealing in the fullest manner with the whole question of the prosecution of the war. This speech occupies nearly thirty columns of *Hansard*, and it was acknowledged on all hands to have been one of much force and point. Mr. Bright began by observing that the basis for discussion was furnished by these points—the object of the war, whether that object had or had not been sufficiently accomplished, and whether there was anything in prospect likely to be gained that would justify the Government and the House in proceeding further with the war. The avowed object of the war was simply to secure the Turkish territory from the grasp of Russia, and perhaps from that of other Powers. It had been distinctly declared by the Government that we were not at war for nationalities, or for conquest, or for crippling Russia, or for dismemberment. Lord John Russell had stated this. Lord Palmerston had turned the cold shoulder to Hungary, and Lord John Russell had told the House that it was quite a mistake to suppose that he ever intended to go to war for Poland. Having got rid of Hungary and Poland, it only now required some member of the Cabinet to get up and state that it was utterly impossible for this country to involve itself in hostilities with a view to the regeneration of any part of Italy. With regard to the present war there was general mystification, and at that moment almost every man was in the dark as to the ultimate objects of the war. The simple question was, considering the condition in which Turkey had long existed, what were the means by which the security of Turkey could be guaran-



teed: that security could not be absolute; it must be partial and conditional. He assumed that the terms offered to Russia at Vienna were offered sincerely and in earnest; then, the question was whether those terms, called bases, contained a sufficient guarantee for the integrity of Turkey, bases being capable of development. He would not go through all the 'Four Points,' because the attention of the House ought really to be centred upon the third article and the matters connected with it. 'The House must remember that this article involves two most important subjects—first, the territorial guarantee, which if it were sufficiently secured would be everything the House and the country required from the war—namely, that the territories of Turkey shall never be molested, so long as the treaty shall continue, by any of the great Powers who are parties to such treaty; and, secondly, that the preponderance of Russia in the Black Sea shall cease. Now, the territorial guarantee was granted without difficulty.' As to the question of the Christian protectorate, if the proposition of Russia had been correctly stated, and assuming the abolition of the Menschikoff Note and the old protectorate treaties, surely the House would consider whether the combination of the three propositions—the territorial guarantees, the Christian protectorate, and the Black Sea project—did not give such securities to Turkey as the condition of Turkey would permit.

Discussing next the preponderance of Russia in the Black Sea, Mr. Bright observed that his friend Mr. Cobden had clearly shown that this preponderance was in a certain sense a fact which all the negotiations in the world could not write off. They were concerned with the question, how was that preponderance to cease? but he must contend against the proposition of Lord John Russell, which, instead of merely reducing the preponderance of Russia in the Black Sea, would transfer the supremacy in that sea from Russia. Some hon. gentlemen talked as if Russia were a Power which you could take to Bow Street, and bind over before some stipendiary magistrate to keep the peace for six months. He was of opinion, with respect to the first proposition of Russia, that it was for the true interests of Europe and of Turkey herself that the Straits should be open, which would put a stop to the preponderance of Russia in the

Euxine. There would be no sort of pretence for wrangling about the Straits; and the balance of power—if he might use the term—between the fleets of Russia, France, and England, would be probably the best guarantee that could be offered for the security of Constantinople and Turkey, so far as they were in danger of aggression either from the Black Sea or the Mediterranean. The second proposition was that the Straits should be closed, but that the Sultan might open them at will; and he asked the House whether, assuming that there was any difference between either of these proposals and that of the Government, the difference was worse than the incalculable calamities which war must bring upon the country, and whether the Government were justified in breaking off the negotiations. As to the coercion of Russia, if any diplomatist from this country, under the same circumstances as Russia was placed in, had consented to terms such as the noble lord had endeavoured to force upon Russia, he (the speaker) maintained that if he entered the door of that House, he would be met by one universal shout of execration, and as a public man would be ruined for ever. ‘I am of opinion that with the territorial guarantee and the abolition of the Christian protectorate, either the terms proposed by the noble Lord or by Prince Gortchakoff would have been as secure for Turkey as it is possible under existing circumstances for Turkey to be by any treaty between the Great Powers of Europe.’

Mr. Bright next traced the cost of the war already to this country in blood and treasure, and continued: ‘Hon. members may think this is nothing. They say it is a “low” view of the case. But these things are the foundation of your national greatness, and of your national duration; and you may be following visionary phantoms in all parts of the world while your own country is becoming rotten within, and calamities may be in store for the monarchy and the nation, of which now, it appears, you take no heed. Every man connected with trade knows how much trade has suffered, how much profits in every branch of trade—except in contracts arising out of the war—have diminished, how industry is becoming more precarious and the reward for industry less, how the price of food is raised, and how much there is of a growing pressure on all classes,

especially upon the poorest of the people—a pressure which by and by—not just now, when the popular frenzy is lashed into fury morning after morning by the newspapers—(murmurs)—but I say by and by this discontent will grow rapidly, and you (pointing to the Ministerial bench) who now fancy you are fulfilling the behests of the national will, will find yourselves pointed to as the men who ought to have taught the nation better.’ He would not enter into the question of the harvest, but he trusted it might not fail, for then we should have, in addition to the calamities of war, calamities arising from a scarcity of food.

He had no confidence whatever in Her Majesty’s Government, and there were many men on both sides who wished that at this critical moment the affairs of the country were under the guidance of men of greater solidity and of better judgment. Mr. Bright instanced in proof of this the policy of Lords Russell and Palmerston towards Austria. They knew perfectly well that if Austria were to join either with Russia on the one hand, or with the Western Powers on the other, in all human probability that great empire would no longer remain the ‘great conservative Power in the midst of Europe,’ but would be stripped on the one side of her Italian provinces, and of Hungary on the other; or, if not stripped of these two portions of the empire, would be plunged into an interminable anarchy which would prove destructive of her power. With regard to the French alliance, so far as the war was concerned, it depended upon one life. The existing French dynasty might be a permanent or an ephemeral one, and it behoved us to consider the ground on which we were standing. Lord Clarendon had told us, with regard to Russia, that Europe was standing on a mine, and did not know it; but Lord Clarendon by his blunders had placed England on a mine far more dangerous and destructive. It was frightful, too, to be now told by Lord John Russell that we were not fighting for ourselves, but for Germany. Twenty-seven millions of people living in these islands were to come forward as the defenders of the sixty millions of people in Germany, in a contest in which we had no interest!

The hon. member further said that the vast sacrifices we had

already made touched the very foundations of our national greatness and our national duration. He also contrasted at length the financial and commercial condition of the United States of America with that of this country, which showed a balance of taxation of £70,000,000 a year in favour of the former, suggesting the effect which this fact might have in removing capital from this country to America. 'Sir, six years of this war, at an annual expenditure of £70,000,000, give £420,000,000 to the side of the United States as against the condition of the people of this country. Am I, then, talking of trifles? Am I talking to sane men, that it is necessary to bring forward facts like these? I am amazed, when the newspaper press, when public speakers, when gentlemen on both sides of this House, are so ready to listen and to speak upon questions relating to Turkey, to Servia, or to Schamyl, that I cannot get the House of Commons to consider a question so great as the expenditure of £420,000,000, and when we have to consider if we shall trust that vast issue in the hands of the noble lords and right hon. gentlemen on the Treasury bench.'

Mr. Bright next commented upon the utterances—sometimes contradictory—of the various Ministers in connection with the war, justifying his want of confidence in them. He first referred to Sir William Molesworth, Mr. Gladstone, and Sir Charles Wood, and after showing why he considered they had forfeited confidence, he proceeded to remark severely upon the conduct of Lords Palmerston and Russell, whom he held responsible for the policy of the war. Lord John Russell had been especially injudicious, and while Lord Aberdeen was honestly endeavouring to secure peace, the noble lord was taking a course which rendered statesmanship valueless. Mr. Bright pursued his attack with animation :—

'The noble lord, however, at last brought his conduct to a climax. The hon. and learned member for Sheffield (Mr. Roebuck) came forward as a little David—(laughter)—with sling and stone—weapons which he did not even use, but at the sight of which the Whig Goliath went howling and vanquished to the back benches. (Loud cheers and renewed laughter.)

'I am afraid, Sir, to trust myself to speak of the conduct of the noble lord on that occasion. I presume that we shall have to wait for the advent of that Somersetshire historian whose coming the noble lord expects, before we know whether his conduct

on that occasion was, what some persons still call it, treachery to his chief, or whether it arose from that description of moral cowardice which in every man is the death of all true statesmanship. (Loud cheers.) But in the year 1852 the noble lord the member for London gave me a strong reason why I should feel no confidence in his present chief. The House will remember that he then ejected the First Minister under whom he now serves from the Cabinet of which he himself was then the head, and in the explanation which he made to the House he told us that men like Lord Grey and Lord Melbourne, men of age, of authority, and experience, had been able in some degree to control his noble friend, but that he, being younger than the noble lord, and having been a shorter time on the political stage, had found it difficult to control him. The description which the noble lord might give of his colleague is a little like that which we occasionally see given of a runaway horse—that he got the bit between his teeth, and there was no holding him.' (Laughter.)

The hon. member, having further illustrated what he regarded as the blundering policy of Lord John Russell, said that as regarded Lord Palmerston, he had often opposed him, because he treated all these great questions with a want of seriousness that showed strong convictions upon them to be lacking in him. But the House was now in the hands of the two noble lords, who were the authors of the war, and who were supreme in the Cabinet. 'They have, carried on the war. They have, however, not yet crippled Russia, although it is generally admitted that they have almost destroyed Turkey. They have not yet saved Europe in its independence and civilisation; they have only succeeded in convulsing it. They have not added to the honour and renown of England, but they have placed the honour and renown of this country in peril. The country has been, I am afraid, the sport of their ancient rivalry, and I should be very sorry if it should be the victim of the policy which they have so long advocated.' Mr. Bright again referred to the terrible pressure which the war caused upon the people of this country. The House must know that the people were misled and bewildered, and every member ought boldly to say so, and thus place it out of the power of the press to mislead the country as it had done for the last twelve months. He asked, in conclusion, 'If they are thus misled and bewildered, is it not the duty of this House to speak with the voice of authority in this hour of peril? We are the depositaries of the power and the guardians of the interests of a great nation and of an ancient monarchy. Why should we not fully measure our

responsibility? Why should we not disregard the small-minded ambition that struggles for place? and why should we not, by a faithful, just, and earnest policy, restore, as I believe we may, tranquillity to Europe, and prosperity to the country so dear to us?’

At the conclusion of the debate on the 8th of June, Mr. Lowe’s amendment was negatived, and Sir F. Baring’s amendment accepted, without a division.

On the following day, speaking at the Trinity House banquet, Prince Albert said that Constitutional Government was undergoing a heavy trial; and he called upon the country to show a patriotic confidence in the Ministry. The Sebastopol Committee having reported, Mr. Roebuck brought forward a vote of censure upon Ministers. Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton also gave notice of a motion censuring Lord John Russell, whereupon the latter anticipated its effect by resigning. Mr. Roebuck’s resolution came to the vote on the 19th of July, when the ‘previous question’ was carried by 289 to 182 votes. Many animated speeches were made in the course of the debate, Mr. Bright again speaking with much power.

He began by expressing his acquiescence in the report of the Sebastopol Committee, and insisting that the House were bound to take proceedings upon it. The motion was evidently directed against Lord Palmerston and the existing Government, because Mr. Roebuck had excluded three members of the late Government by his highflown compliments; and if Lord John Russell had escaped, it was because when he found that his confederates were going to be captured he turned king’s evidence. After the laughter which this remark occasioned had subsided, Mr. Bright turned upon Lord Palmerston, whose warlike propensities he severely condemned. He also inveighed against the ignorant and profligate press, in obedience to whose dictates Ministers had ordered the expedition to the Crimea, quoting the words of Kossuth—‘a poor exile who has not £5000 a year’—to show that Ministers might have known the expedition would fail; and hinting that a clamour had been got up in the press to drive Lord John Russell from his convictions, and cause the rejection of the Austrian terms. But there had been also a cabal against him within doors:—

‘The noble lord made a reference to it in his speech, and I confess that I sympathised with him in the expressions which he then used. I should like to know where the ten or a dozen subordinates of the Government met. (Cheers.) Was it upstairs? Was it downstairs? (Laughter.) Was it in the cellar sacred to Guy Fawkes? (Renewed laughter.) Was it in a sewer?—(laughter)—for there it certainly should have been if it was intended that the locality should harmonise with the objects of the meeting. (Renewed laughter and cheers.) I am told that there were civilians there and lawyers—civilians trembling for their places—lawyers in terror lest the death of some judge should find them sitting on that (the Opposition) side of the House. (Laughter and cheers.) It was a saying of the late Lord Stowell, speaking of the effects of ambition, that “ambition breaks the ties of blood and forgets the obligations of gratitude.” Here we have men who owe to the patronage and favour of the noble lord their partial emergence from Parliamentary obscurity, and they have joined in this disreputable and contemptible cabal against him. (Loud cheers.) The noble lord at the head of the Government did not satisfy my notion of what was right in the observations he made the other night on this question. . . . He was willing to repeat what Sir Robert Walpole said when he prevailed on Mr. Pulteney to accept a peerage: “I have turned the key of the closet on him.” He appeared as if conscious that he had got rid of his ancient rival, and was about to start anew without competition on the floor of the House as leader of the Whig party.’ (Cheers.)

Mr. Bright’s renewed attack on Lord Palmerston was very spirited. Referring to the latter’s speech on the preceding Monday, he exclaimed, ‘What a speech it was! I appeal to every member of this House, except the members of the cabal that ejected the noble lord the member for London from office,—I appeal to every other member of the House, whether, if they look back to the times of Sir Robert Peel, of the noble lord (Russell), or of the right hon. member for Bucks (Mr. Disraeli), they do not find in each of those cases something to admire, while at the same time they must see in the conduct of the noble lord the member for Tiverton something to humiliate them, and which they must inevitably condemn.’ (Loud cheers.) The cheering was renewed, this time mingled with laughter, when Mr. Bright, still referring to Lord Palmerston, said that the Queen might make a Prime Minister, but it was not in royalty to make a statesman. If the waters were smooth, if the sky were clear, he could have no confidence in the noble lord; but the waters were not smooth, the sky was not clear—never less so. We were at a critical hour of the national career. ‘He seems to me to be insensible to the fact that the clouds are gathering round the

horizon of this country; he appears not to know that his policy is the doom of death to thousands upon thousands, carrying desolation to the homes of England, and sorrow to millions of hearts. He may perchance never see that which comes often to my vision, the interminable ghastly procession of our slaughtered countrymen, to which every day fresh lists of victims are added. I see these things, I speak in apprehension of them, and in their presence I have no confidence in the noble lord, whose conduct is, I believe, humiliating to the House and full of peril to the country.' (Loud cheers.)

The sympathy of the public went with the hon. member for Manchester in his vigorous denunciation of Lord Palmerston's conduct towards his late colleague, although the country was not at one with him upon the general war question.

With this trenchant address we reach the end of Mr. Bright's Parliamentary utterances on the Crimean war. But before peace was concluded he spoke on many occasions out of the House on this question. In October 1855, he attended a meeting at Rochdale, called for the purpose of making a presentation to Mr. Sharman Crawford, the late member for the borough, and in the course of his speech made some references to his own opinions on the war. He had attacked the press, he said, but fairly and honestly, and of course he would be abused by the press. He reminded his hearers that in the great war with France at the commencement of the century, the English press had made it impossible for the Government to preserve the peace. The eleven years of war made hundreds of thousands of beggars and criminals within the United Kingdom, and every hundred pounds now which the Chancellor of the Exchequer took in taxes for the present war was making also its pauper or its criminal. 'The (Crimean) war may be honourable, but I assure you that those little children of yours who are now ornamenting your homes and gladdening your hearts, when they grow up to be men and women, and look back to the history of the times through which we are now passing, will have wonderful difficulty to discover in the restoration of Mohammedan power, or the humiliation of Russia, or the glory of the British arms, anything that can compensate them for the crushing taxes from which they can only escape by emigrating



from a country which should have afforded them a happy home during their lives.'

At Hulme, and at Marsden, on other occasions, Mr. Bright affirmed his desire for legislation based upon just, moral, and Christian principles. He did not believe in the grand schemes of policy advanced by kings, queens, or cabinets, which flew in the face of almost ordinary resolutions of Christian morality; and there was no greater evil that came from a condition of national twilight than that we were always getting into a state of panic. When the hon. member and Mr. Milner Gibson addressed their constituents in the Manchester Corn Exchange on the 28th of January 1856, Mr. Bright ridiculed the phrase, 'the defence of the liberties of Europe,' which Lord John Russell had borrowed from the King's speech in the time of William III. 'The balance of power' was another admirable phrase, which no man living had ever understood, or succeeded in defining. It would last until men grew wiser, and found there was nothing whatever in it. It was like hunting for the philosopher's stone, or perpetual motion. They had been living under a government of old, old lords since 1688; and they would not have been able to sleep in their beds, if those who managed the affairs of the country were also the managers of their private affairs. Amidst general laughter and cheering, he quoted these lines from Ben Jonson:—

'Hood an ass with reverend purple,  
So you can hide his two ambitious ears,  
And he shall pass for a Cathedral Doctor.

Who would say that the rulers of the United States were not as good rulers as the average monarchs of this country, or of the rest of Europe? For himself and his friends, Mr. Bright said that they would continue to confront unflinchingly all the batteries that ridicule or malice might point against them.

There is no need for us to trace further the progress of the Crimean war, the facts being within the recollection of all readers of English history of the present generation. Suffice it to state that the allies were victorious, and that on the 30th of March 1856, the

treaty of peace was signed. There are many, however, who on this matter will take up the language of the ballad in which Southey makes old Kaspar describe the battle of Blenheim—

‘ But what good came of it at last ?  
Quoth little Peterkin ;—  
Why, that I cannot tell, said he,  
But ’twas a famous victory.’

It is no part of our duty to attempt to define in what degree English statesmen were wrong and Mr. Bright was right—or *vice versa*—in the Crimean war. There are few, however, who now defend that war from its inception to its close ; while Mr Bright and those who agreed with him have only been confirmed in their original views with the lapse of time. It has been our object rather to put the reader in possession of full information from Mr. Bright’s own lips of his attitude and convictions upon this great question ; and upon this information we must leave him to form his own judgment. But one lesson may be gathered by the friends and opponents alike of this eminent statesman, from the consistent and upright conduct which he pursued throughout the struggle. This lesson was well indicated by Mr. Gladstone in a speech delivered at Birmingham, twenty years after the conclusion of the conflict with Russia, when he said that we ought all to be ready to make sacrifices, as Mr. Bright showed himself to be ready, at the time of the Crimean war, to lay his popularity as a sacrifice upon the altar of his duty. It is sometimes difficult, even when our convictions support us, to dare to be in the right with two or three. Mr. Bright did this, nevertheless, in a cause which he believed to be right, and his courage and honesty will continue to draw forth, in consequence, a tribute of admiration from all classes, including those who are separated from him in political sentiment and opinion.

## CHAPTER XIII.

*MR. BRIGHT'S FIRST ILLNESS.—REJECTION AT MANCHESTER.*

Mr. Bright's Illness in 1856.—Visits to Scotland, Algiers, and Nice.—Interesting Interview with the Empress of Russia.—Mr. Bright visits Rome and Switzerland.—Offers to resign his seat for Manchester.—The offer not accepted.—The Palmerston Government defeated on the Chinese question.—Mr. Bright in accord with Mr. Cobden.—Dissolution of Parliament.—The Election for Manchester.—Messrs. Bright and Gibson defeated by a Coalition.—Opinion of the Press on the Election.—Mr. Bright's Farewell Address to his late Constituents.—His temporary Retirement from Public Life.



HE anxieties of several critical and memorable years began to tell upon Mr. Bright, and in January 1856, he became ill. There was thorough prostration of the nervous system, the result of the arduous nature of his public duties, combined with the excitement arising from the war with Russia. Nevertheless, he went up to London at the opening of Parliament, hoping to be able to bear some part in the work of the session, but he was compelled to return home.

In the month of March, Lord Brougham generously offered the use of his villa at Cannes to Mr. Bright and his family until the following winter. The offer, however, which was conveyed through Mr. Cobden, was gratefully declined. Mr. Bright went to Ben Rhydding, a well-known hydropathic establishment in Yorkshire, where he spent two months. Not deriving the benefit he expected from this, he then went down to Scotland, and spent several months in the Highlands, fishing in its lochs and rivers. Some weeks were spent at Glengarry, on the invitation of his kind friend Mr. Edward

Ellice, the member for Coventry. In the autumn, Mr. Bright paid a visit to Lord Aberdeen, at Haddo House, in Aberdeenshire. It may be stated here that the subject of our biography always recognised the earnest efforts made by Lord Aberdeen to secure peace before the outbreak of the Crimean war, and he was a statesman whom, in many respects, he held in high regard.

In the month of November, Mr. Bright left England for Algiers, and spent some weeks in the French colony. He afterwards visited Italy, in company with his eldest daughter, who went out from England to join him.

At Nice, in January 1857, Mr. Bright had an interesting interview with the Empress of Russia, the wife of the Emperor Nicholas, and grandmother of the present Emperor. The Empress, hearing of his arrival in Nice, sent Baron Meyendorf to ask him to call upon her, which he accordingly did—in company with his daughter—on the Russian New Year's day.

The Empress gave her reasons why she wished to see him, and said, 'I know you have been just to my country.'

Mr. Bright replied that he wished to be, and thought he had been, just to both countries.

The Empress spoke with much feeling, saying that she could never understand why England should have made war upon Russia. Her Majesty spoke English, though not fluently.

Baron Meyendorf, who was one of the attached servants of the Empress, lost his son at the siege of Sebastopol; and as he mentioned his loss to Mr. Bright, the tears coursed down his cheeks. Speaking of the Empress after the interview, he said, 'The Empress is so good,—I love her as my mother.'

From Nice, Mr. Bright went by way of Geneva to Civita Vecchia and Rome. In the 'Eternal City' he stayed about two months—that is, until the middle of March, and then he went north to Florence and Venice, and thence to Milan and Turin. At Turin he had a long and interesting conversation with the celebrated Italian statesman Count Cavour, chiefly relating to the Emperor of the French, and the manner in which the Treaty of Paris had been concocted in the preceding year.

Going next by the Italian lakes, Mr. Bright passed over the Simplon into Switzerland, where Mrs. Bright joined him for a short tour. Upon its conclusion, in the month of July, they returned to England. The right hon. gentleman found his health much improved after his prolonged absence from England.

During the absence of Mr. Bright upon the Continent, important political events had been transpiring in England; but before tracing these, some mention must be made of the hon. member's relations with his Manchester constituency. Feeling that so important a city should enjoy a more active and vigorous representation than he could hope to give it for some time to come, Mr. Bright wrote a letter to his committee, before leaving England for the Continent, in which he said, 'I have consulted physicians of extensive practice and eminent in their profession, and their opinions all concur in this, that a complete rest from labour for a longer period is necessary, and that this it is believed will give me renewed health and strength. Acting upon this advice, which my own judgment entirely approves, I am about to leave home for some months, and shall, therefore, in all probability, not be able to attend the House of Commons during the next session of Parliament.' Mr. Bright consequently offered to resign his seat for Manchester.

His letter was laid before a meeting of the Liberal electors of Manchester on the 30th of January 1857, and on the motion of Mr. George Wilson, the following resolution was carried: 'That this meeting expresses its profound regret at the circumstances which unhappily necessitate the absence of its esteemed representative, Mr. John Bright, and desires to record its unabated confidence in his signal ability, and the high moral courage, universally acknowledged, with which he has hitherto represented this great metropolis of industry in Parliament; that it hereby begs respectfully to express its admiration of the undeviating consistency and unflinching firmness with which he has adhered to those great principles on which he was elected, as well as its warmest gratitude for the eminent services which he has rendered to the nation; that while deeply sympathising with him under the serious indisposition which has compelled him to retire for a season from public duties, it derives sincere satisfaction

from the prospect that he will be able ere long to re-enter upon them ; and that while cheerfully conceding to him the interval of repose which may be necessary for the complete restoration of his health, it requests him to allow the continuance of his Parliamentary connection with this city, in the earnest hope that the cause of popular rights, of social progress, and of international concord may soon regain the assistance of his disinterested and distinguished advocacy in the House of Commons.' The resolution was carried unanimously with every demonstration of applause, and in the course of the proceedings Mr. Bazley and Mr. Milner Gibson paid a high tribute to the hon. member's eloquence, and his undaunted moral and political courage.

In March 1857, the Palmerston Government suffered a defeat in connection with the serious rupture with China. The circumstances of the quarrel may be briefly narrated. A lorch called the *Arrow*, showing British colours, had been seized by the Chinese, and the question arose whether it was entitled to the protection of the British flag. In the course of a debate in the House of Lords, Lord Derby insisted that it could have no such claim, and adduced statements made by Sir John Bowring, our representative, to the effect that the licence to carry the English flag had expired some time before. His lordship also affirmed that the quarrel had arisen through Sir J. Bowring's absorbing desire to bring about his own official reception in Canton. Lord Derby's motion was lost, there being a majority against it of 36 ; but in the Commons, a motion condemning the Government had a different result.

This resolution, which was brought forward by Mr. Cobden on the 26th of February, ran as follows : 'That this House has heard with concern of the conflicts which have occurred between the British and Chinese authorities on the Canton River ; and without expressing an opinion as to the extent to which the Government of China may have afforded this country cause of complaint respecting the non-fulfilment of the Treaty of 1842, this House considers that the papers which have been laid upon the table fail to establish satisfactory grounds for the violent measures resorted to at Canton in the late affair of the *Arrow* ; and that a Select Committee be

appointed to inquire into the state of our commercial relations with China.' After a debate extending over four nights, in which the high legal opinion of Mr. Phillimore went completely against the Government, Mr. Cobden's motion was carried by 263 to 247 votes, thus showing a majority of 16 against the Government. Lord Palmerston thereupon decided to dissolve Parliament, but Mr. Cobden asked what was to be done in the meantime respecting the quarrel with China. Some one, he said, should be at once sent out to supersede all present British authority in China. Sir George Grey, on behalf of the Government, said that they would do all in their power to protect British subjects and their property in China.

Mr. Bright was, as we have seen, abroad when this debate took place, but it was well known that had he been present in the House of Commons he would have voted with the majority, and in condemnation of the war. Nor was it alone on the question of the *lorcha Arrow* that Mr. Cobden, Mr. Bright, and those who sympathised with them, were dissatisfied with the course of the Government. They were opposed to its whole policy in respect to China, as being unnecessarily aggressive, and as tending disastrously to impair the commercial and friendly intercourse between the two countries. They regarded the Chinese wars of the period as opposed to the true spirit of humanity.

In view of the impending general election, the Manchester Liberal Committee met in the Free Trade Hall, and unanimously selected as their candidates the sitting members, Mr. Bright and Mr. Milner Gibson. Mr. Bright, in a letter to Mr. G. Wilson, dated Rome, March 8, had written stating that, although he could not at present return to England, his health was sensibly improving; and he added, 'I have consulted some friends here whom I know, and they are altogether unwilling to entertain the idea that the state of my health now is a sufficient reason why I should withdraw; and I should say the same, did not I know how often we are biassed by our wishes in deciding questions in which we are deeply interested. After much consideration, I have come to the conclusion, in which, perhaps, nothing is absolutely concluded—for after stating the case fairly I must leave it in other hands—that the interests of the con-

stituency, that is, of the Liberal majority, and the welfare of the Liberal cause, must in reality decide the question. Do not, for a moment even, put my feelings, or position, or prospects in the scale against what is best for the interest and reputation of the constituency of Manchester. If there is a wish that I should stand as a candidate at this election, and if it be thought that the something of uncertainty as to my health, and my unavoidable absence from England at this moment, will not prevent my return if I am brought forward, then I am willing to offer myself for re-election. If, on the contrary, many persons should doubt my being able again to return to public life, and if they should be unwilling that one of their representatives should be so long absent from the House,—if they should show a coldness because I am not present to assist in the contest, and to such an extent as to make the election a difficult and doubtful one, then I think you will do your duty to me and to the constituency by not allowing my name to appear. I am sure you will decide for the best, and I shall be entirely satisfied with the result.’ But the committee determined to nominate Mr. Bright.

A great meeting of the Liberal electors was held on the 18th of March in the Free Trade Hall, when Mr. Milner Gibson delivered an address, and a vote of thanks was passed to the two members for the city for their past services, as well as a resolution pledging the meeting to use every lawful means to return them again to the House of Commons. Mr. Cobden spoke warmly on behalf of his friend, observing that no two human beings ever enjoyed together a more transparent intimacy of mind than himself and Mr. Bright. There was scarcely a view, or a thought, or an aspiration which they did not possess in common, though Mr. Bright had an ability and an eloquence to which he (Mr. Cobden) could make no pretensions. ‘I say,’ continued the speaker, ‘you have not the character, the fame, or the destinies of Mr. Bright in your hands, but I will tell you this, that your own character and reputation are at stake. I will tell you what I heard one of the oldest and most sagacious men in the House of Commons say—that he did not believe there was any man in the House, with the exception of Mr. Bright and Mr. Gladstone, who ever changed votes by their eloquence. Now that



is a great tribute to pay to a man. Although we, many of us, may probably convince people by our arguments, we do not convert them and make them change their votes. It requires logic and reasoning power, but it requires something else—it requires those transcendent powers of eloquence which your representative possesses.’ Mr. Cobden concluded by recapitulating Mr. Bright’s services in connection with the increase in the register, the question of Free Trade, &c., and asked who had benefited so much by the efforts of the ‘Manchester School’ as Manchester itself.

The nomination took place in St. Ann’s Square, in the presence of some twenty thousand persons. The candidates nominated were Sir John Potter, Mr. James Aspinall Turner, Mr. Bright, and Mr. Milner Gibson. Sir J. Potter and Mr. Turner were Palmerstonian Liberals ; and as no Conservative candidates were brought forward, they received the whole strength of the Conservative vote, as well as the support of the Whigs, and those Liberals who were in favour of Lord Palmerston’s policy. Mr. Bright’s brother-in-law, Mr. Vaughan, spoke on his behalf ; and the other three candidates addressed the immense assemblage. The show of hands was declared to be in favour of Mr. Bright and Sir John Potter. On the following day, however, the result of the poll showed that the coalition of parties had been too strong for the old members. The numbers were—for Sir John Potter, 8368 ; Mr. J. A. Turner, 7854 ; Mr. Milner Gibson, 5588 ; and Mr. John Bright, 5458.

While Mr. Bright’s active participation in the contest might have greatly modified these figures, it was no doubt beyond his power to change the result. Owing to a variety of causes, Lord Palmerston was very popular in the country, a strong idea being prevalent in favour of what was regarded as his spirited and patriotic foreign policy. He enjoyed, moreover, all the prestige attaching to the successful conclusion of the Crimean war, while exaggerated reports of fearful atrocities committed by the Chinese came opportunely to his aid, and thus bore favourably upon the very policy for which he had been condemned by the House of Commons. Many other prominent opponents of the Ministry lost their seats on this occasion. Mr. Cobden, who left the West Riding to contest Huddersfield, was

defeated; Mr. Layard was beaten at Aylesbury, and Mr. Fox at Oldham; and the ranks of the Peelites were considerably thinned. Lord Palmerston obtained an increased majority in the elections.

As in the case of Mr. Gladstone and Oxford University at a later period, the distinguished services of Mr. Bright were disregarded; and the electors of Manchester, unwilling to yield independence on one or two important questions, preferred to elect respectable but unknown politicians to those whose talents had shed lustre upon the city. Mr. Bright's defeat was more keenly felt by the country generally than any other which marked the course of the elections. The press, also, including that portion of it which had been most strongly opposed to Mr. Bright, expressed regret at his temporary exclusion from the House of Commons.\*

\* From a great number of articles which appeared in the daily and weekly journals, we take the following extracts. The *Times*, referring to Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright, said: 'For ten years we have opposed these two gentlemen in well-nigh every act of their public life, and yet now we must honestly say that we deeply regret to see erased from the roll-call of the House of Commons the names of Mr. John Bright and Mr. Richard Cobden.' The *Daily News* observed that 'the town which has won with such effect so great a fame in the electoral field, now sinks back into insignificance, preferring local thrift to the world-wide honour of being represented by the most distinguished men in Parliament, and in that insignificance Manchester may be left for the present, while others draw the moral which is yielded by the defeat of the peace party in all directions.' 'In Bright,' remarked the *Saturday Review*, 'Parliament has lost one of its ablest orators and brightest ornaments, and these are not times in which such losses are easily repaired. The greatest danger to our institutions is to be looked for in the deterioration of the character and ability of their representative body. It may be very convenient for an Administration to rule with undisputed sway over submissive mediocrities; but if the standard of ability in the House of Commons should ever be permanently degraded in public estimation, the end of Parliamentary government will not be far off.' The *Manchester Examiner and Times*, after remarking that a little trimming on the part of Mr. Bright would have ensured him an undisturbed popularity, said: 'He has maintained the same uncompromising independence towards great and small, Ministers and people, the blandishments of aristocratic favour, or the acclamation of the populace. Yet his heart was not destitute of ambition. Yes, his was the ambition to check the abuses of the Executive, to urge a righteous and beneficent policy upon the Government, to stand forth as the dauntless champion of the rights of the people, to infuse into our dealings with other nations that justice and that generosity which alone become a Christian state, and to harmonise the institutions of England with what is due to the welfare and progress of mankind. He has never deviated a hair's breadth from the accomplishment of these

After the close of the poll, a Liberal meeting was held at Newall's Buildings. Mr. George Wilson, who presided, said that Mr. John Bright was almost the only man the cotton districts had produced who had become famous, not only in the House of Commons, but in the world; and it was sad to think that Manchester, which had been represented by such men as Mr. Bright

objects.' 'We are bound to say,' observed the *Dublin University Magazine*, 'strongly as we differ from the late policy of these great Manchester twins, that neither their honour nor their motives are assailable, and that the men who have been returned in their stead can no more be compared to them than the Bushman can be ranked with a Briton. The country has failed in its gratitude.' The *Birmingham Daily Post* said that 'had any member of the last Parliament been asked the names of the six foremost men in that assembly, the name of Mr. John Bright would have been one of the six. He was foremost in oratory, and, better still, in singleness of purpose, straightforwardness of speech, and thorough conscientiousness and honesty.' The *Commonwealth* declared that 'never until the race of the Manchester men had we a party capable at once of arousing the nation and commanding the ear of the Senate. Such a party is much too valuable to be permitted to pass away. It will one day be wanted quite as much as at any former time.' The *Liverpool Northern Daily Times* said: 'The amount of labour Mr. Bright has gone through has been quite prodigious, and no wonder that brain and health have been impaired. We trust that this will only be for a time, and that he will rise up like a giant refreshed with sleep, and again gird himself to the combat with political and spiritual wickedness in high places.' 'There is no single man to whom Manchester owes more than to Mr. John Bright,' affirmed the *Leeds Mercury*, 'nor is there any man whose continued exclusion from the House we should more deeply regret. At the present moment, however, this unexpected relief from Parliamentary duties may be of great advantage to the health of one of the most illustrious champions of Free Trade, of one of our ablest orators, and of one of the most independent representatives who has ever had a seat in the House of Commons.' 'The exclusion of such a man as Mr. Bright from the House of Commons is a national loss,' said the *Edinburgh Daily Review*. 'As we read over the dreary columns of aimless talk by men of no name, we shall miss the glowing eloquence of the man who never spoke but to forward the cause of truth and justice, and never ceased without having added something to the glory and fame of the assembly of which he was a member.' The *Liverpool Daily Post* said: 'In the great work Mr. Cobden sacrificed his fortune, and Mr. Bright undermined the most sacred part of his health. From the odium of this election our neighbours will never escape.' The *Edinburgh Daily Express* observed that 'Mr. John Bright, the greatest living orator, the most conscientious of public men, twice returned triumphantly for Manchester, after wasting his health and almost his life in the people's cause, is placed at the foot of the poll.' Extracts of this nature could be multiplied, but those already quoted will sufficiently attest the general feeling of the press in regard to Mr. Bright's defeat.

and Mr. Gibson, possessing such ability—and without proving one single accusation against them, or showing that they had deviated in the least iota from their principles—should exhibit such a change of feeling as they had seen that day. Mr. Jacob Bright said he believed his brother would rather have been the representative of a large constituency in Lancashire than have taken any official position, whatever dignity it might have added to his name. His sorrow would be, not that Manchester had rejected him, but because it seemed for the moment to trample upon his principles.

The news of his defeat reached Mr. Bright at Florence, and from that city he wrote his farewell address to the electors of Manchester, dated March 31st, 1857. As this address is really a defence of Mr. Bright's political career up to the time of his rejection at Manchester, and is consequently a document of considerable historical value and importance, we append it in full :—

‘GENTLEMEN,—I have received a telegraphic despatch informing me of the result of the election contest in which you have been engaged. That result has not greatly surprised me, and, so far as I am personally concerned—inasmuch as it liberates me from public life in a manner which involves on my part no shrinking from any duty—I cannot seriously regret it. I lament it on public grounds, because it tells the world that many amongst you have abandoned the opinions you professed to hold in the year 1847, and even so recently as in the year 1852.

‘I believe that slander itself has not dared to charge me with having forsaken any of the principles, on the honest support of which I offered myself twice, and was twice accepted, as your representative. The charge against me has rather been that I have too warmly and too faithfully defended the political views which found so much favour with you at the two previous elections. If the change in the opinion of me has arisen from my course on the question of the war with Russia, I can only say that on a calm review of all the circumstances of the case—and during the past twelve months I have had ample time for such a review—I would not unsay or retract any one of the speeches I have spoken, or erase from the records of Parliament any one of the votes I have given upon it, if I could thereby reverse the decision to which you have come, or secure any other distinction which it is in the power of my countrymen to confer. I am free, and will remain free, from any share in the needless and guilty bloodshed of that melancholy chapter in the annals of my country.

‘I cannot, however, forget that the leaders of the opposition in the recent contest have not been influenced by my conduct on this question. They were less successful, but not less bitter, in their hostility in 1852, and even in 1854, when my only public merit or demerit consisted in my labours in the cause of Free Trade. On each occasion, calling themselves Liberals, and calling their candidates Liberals also, they coalesced with the Conservatives, whilst now, doubtless, they have assailed Mr. Gibson

and myself on the ground of a pretended coalition with the Conservatives in the House of Commons.

‘I have esteemed it a high honour to be one of your representatives, and have given more of mental and physical labour to your service than was just to myself. I feel it scarcely less an honour to suffer in the cause of peace, and on behalf of what I believe to be the true interests of my country,—though I could have wished that the blow had come from other hands, at a time when I could have been present to meet face to face those who dealt it. In taking my leave of you and of public life, let me assure you that I can never forget the many—the innumerable kindnesses I have received from my friends amongst you. No one will rejoice more than I shall in all that brings you prosperity and honour; and I am not without a hope that when a calmer hour shall come, you will say of Mr. Gibson and of me, that as colleagues in your representation for ten years, we have not sacrificed our principles to gain popularity, or bartered our independence for the emoluments of office or the favours of the great. I feel we have stood for the rights and interests and freedom of the people, and that we have not tarnished the honour, or lessened the renown, of your eminent city.

‘I am now, as I have hitherto been, very faithfully yours,

‘JOHN BRIGHT.’

In May 1857, when Mr. Bright was staying at Geneva, there was forwarded to him an address passed at a public meeting in Ardwick, which, while expressive of goodwill towards the right hon. gentleman, also alluded to his defeat and that of Mr. Cobden, and expressed a determination to agitate for reform, free trade, and retrenchment. In reply, Mr. Bright wrote: ‘I am very glad to find that in your town the cause of reform, free trade, and retrenchment has so many warm friends, and that you have understood and approved the policy which Mr. Cobden, Mr. M. Gibson, and myself, have supported in the House of Commons. On the question of free trade, little progress has been made for some years past. As to retrenchment, the word has become almost obsolete, and the military expenditure of the country is now nearly double the amount which the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel thought necessary in 1835, although we have no more territory to defend, and although a large army is no longer necessary to maintain tranquillity in Ireland. As to reform, whilst almost everybody professes to be in favour of it in some shape, the preparation of the particular bill to be brought forward next year is left in the hands of a Minister whose hostility to every proposition for reform since the year 1832 is notorious and

undeniable. Whether on these three points, to which your resolutions refer, the country is in a satisfactory position, I must leave the friends of free trade, reform, and retrenchment to decide; and with regard to the promised reform, let me warn you not to look more to the question of the franchise than to the other arrangement of the measure. It would be easy to double the number of electors, and at the same time increase the aristocratic influence in Parliament. To give votes, without giving representation in some fair degree in proportion to those votes, is to cheat the people; to give a large number of votes without the security of the ballot, will subject the increased numbers of our countrymen to the degrading influence which wealth and power now exercise so unscrupulously upon the existing electoral body.'

If Mr. Bright cherished for a time the idea of not entering again upon public life, as would seem to be implied by a phrase in his address to the electors of Manchester, it was to the honour of the town of Birmingham, as we shall now see, and to the great gain of Parliament and the country, that before the close of the year 1857 he was induced to abandon such intention.

## CHAPTER XIV.

*RETURNED FOR BIRMINGHAM.*

Vacancy in the Representation of Birmingham.—Meetings to select a Candidate.—Mr. Bright nominated.—He issues his Address.—Observations on Indian Legislation and the Mutiny.—Election of Mr. Bright.—Speech in acknowledgment by Mr. Duncan M'Laren.—Letter from Mr. Bright.—Birmingham and the Reform Question.



HE prolonged exclusion of Mr. Bright from the House of Commons would have been viewed by all parties with extreme regret. Fortunately, as we have already intimated, his absence from the House was of very brief duration. Birmingham stepped forward, and in his enforced absence elected the great popular leader, thus atoning for the temporary ingratitude shown to Mr. Bright at Manchester.

By the death of Mr. G. F. Muntz, a vacancy had arisen in the representation of Birmingham; and on the 1st of August 1857, a meeting of Liberals was held to select a candidate in the place of the deceased member. Mr. Hodgson, ex-Mayor, presided. Mr. Alderman Lloyd, who proposed Mr. Bright, said he was of that courageous and manly disposition that peculiarly fitted him to become their representative. Mr. Bright was well versed in national and foreign affairs, and as there was no man in the House of Commons who had given so much attention to the affairs of England's great tributary, India, his counsel would be especially valuable at the present crisis. He placed the name of Mr. Bright before the meeting as that of a man whose election would do them honour. Mr. Alderman Manton seconded the proposition, but it was opposed by Mr. Councillor











